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MORE LIVES THAN ONE



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MORE LIVES THAN ONE

BY

CAROLYN WELLS



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TO
MY DEAR FRIEND
SOPHIE MACKAY

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CHAPTER I

MADELEINE

"WE have no interests in common, Drew; why should we pretend we want to go to the same places?"

"I wonder if married people ever have interests in common? I wonder if any two people have interests in common—or if it's marriage that makes their interests diverge?"

"There you go, with your inane wondering! I often wonder what you'll find to wonder about after you've wondered about everything!"

Mrs. Andrew Barham shrugged her petulant shoulders and studied her nose in a tiny mirror as she applied a discretionary amount of powder.

"Don't overdo that," and Barham smiled.

He meant it rather by way of jest, but Mrs. Selden took it up.

Now, Mrs. Selden was his mother-in-law, and she was always taking things up. In fact, it was her taking up tendency that was partly responsible for the little rift in the Barhams' lute.

And there was a rift. Not a very big one, nor did it seem to widen much with the years. But this was due to Barham's continual and systematic endeavors that it shouldn't.

Madeleine was trying, at times, but she was his wife. She broke loose occasionally into fearful exhibitions of temper, but this was because she had discovered when a small child that they brought her advantages which she could not get otherwise. And, she was his wife.

So, Barham being of a mild and equable disposition himself, overlooked her fits of temper, put down her tryingness to the fact that they didn't see things from the same viewpoint, and they got along.

Had it not been for Mrs. Selden they would have got along much better, but she had an annoying way of sticking her finger in the little rift and tearing it bigger. This, Barham had to overlook also—for, she was his wife's mother.

Apart from Barham's almost exaggerated chivalry toward women in general, he had a fine sense of honor and duty toward his own people, and this, as you can readily see, made his life a bit difficult here and there.

So, when he lightly advised his wife not to overdo her powdering performance, Mrs. Selden said sharply:

"How you do rag at the poor child, Andrew. As if a bit of innocent powder did any harm!"

The trio were just finishing dinner, and Mrs. Selden laid down her coffee spoon with a faint click, as if to express her utter despair at the fearful inhumanity of man.

She was an extremely handsome woman, just this side of sixty, but trying to look, and fairly well succeeding, about fifty. Her white hair was dressed in large soft waves, and her big dark eyes were still bright and expressive. Her complexion was good and, save for an oversharpeness of features, she would have been beautiful. But beauty, in her case, was sacrificed to aristocracy, and the somewhat hawklike nose, and high cheek bones gave an effect of high birth and good breeding.

These Marcia Selden had, but she had also traits of domination and determination and amazing powers of irritation.

Moreover, she always assumed herself in the right, and took on an injured expression if any one hinted otherwise.

Mother and daughter didn't get on any too well, but they always found common cause in a grievance against Barham.

A little more harshness of character would have stood the man in good stead—but then, he wouldn't have been Andrew Barham.

"Gentle, lovable—somewhat inconsequent old Drew," as his friends called him, would do almost anything to avoid an unpleasantness; and his doing of almost anything made the opportunities for unpleasantnesses even more frequent.

Quite often he tried the soft answer, guaranteed to turn away wrath; sometimes he changed the subject; and sometimes he merely was silent.

This time he tried the last method, and Mrs. Selden took that up.

"Of course you have nothing to say! There is no answer, no excuse for a gratuitous rebuff. Come now—why do you mind Madeleine's powdering her nose?"

"I daresay I'm a bit old-fashioned, mother, but I have a distaste for vanity-cases used at table. Oh, I know it's done—and all that—but as Madeleine is doubtless at once going to her boudoir, it would seem unnecessary—oh, pshaw, I only said it in a joke, anyway."

"A very poor joke, in my estimation," and Mrs. Selden pursed her thin lips in utter and entire disapproval.

So Barham tried changing the subject.

"Whither away to-night, Madeleine? Or staying at home?"

He glanced at her elaborate house gown, thinking what

a pretty woman his wife was. Her dark, bright eyes, her soft dusky hair, and her charming coloring made her almost a beauty. But, like her mother, her attractiveness was lessened by an expression of perversity, a hint of readiness to take offense.

"No; I'm not staying at home—but what does it matter to you where I'm going? As I said, we have no interests in common—and your inquiries are mere politeness!"

"At least, let us keep politeness, Madeleine."

Barham's voice was a bit wistful, and Madeleine might have responded to that note in it, but Mrs. Selden took it up.

"Are you implying that Madeleine is lacking in politeness? Have a care, Andrew! I won't stand everything!"

Now Andrew Barham was not a weak-spirited man, though it might seem so. But his innate courtesy to women and his dread of a scene kept him from any show of righteous indignation at this speech.

Fortunately, Madeleine rose from the table, preventing any further tilting.

"No," she said, suddenly smiling prettily, "I won't tell you where I'm going—yes, I will, I'm going to Mrs. Gardner's. Rest assured it's a place you wouldn't enjoy, so I shan't invite you to go along. Where are you going? To the Club?"

"Yes; maybe to a theater afterward—maybe not."

He looked a bit gloomy as he stood in the hall, lighting a cigarette, and nodding to the man to bring his hat.

"You're extremely good-looking, Drew—but I get so tired of looking at you," his wife said, with a bored little smile. "Perhaps when I see you next, you'll look gayer," and with a mere mockery of throwing a kiss to him, she ran off upstairs to her own rooms.

Mrs. Selden never spent her evenings with "the chil-

dren." She read the papers and then, dawdling over her rather extensive preparations, she went early to bed.

Leaving the house, Barham walked to his favorite Club, and as he went he mused on the strange fate that had given him Madeleine for a wife.

"No interests in common," he quoted to himself. "Why haven't we? If I had her to myself—without mother Selden around—I might persuade her to take up golf or some outdoor thing that we could do together. But she'd never give up her Bridge. And I can't learn the confounded game! Strange, too; I've a good head for lots of things—yet there are nincompoops like Travers and Jim Bell who can put up a wonderful game of Bridge, though they couldn't cope with the tiniest one of my problems.

"If I had a wife, now, like—" but his own sense of right and wrong forbade him to go further.

After all, Madeleine was his wife—and that was all there was about that. He must try, he decided, to make himself more desirable in her eyes. More attractive, more useful—Well, she had said, that though he was good-looking—that *was* a nasty fling! As to being useful—he paid her bills and was always a gallant attendant when she wanted him.

But she seldom wanted him. Usually she preferred to go about with her own cronies, who liked him as little as he liked them.

Not that they were really objectionable. But they were a gay and frivolous lot, and even with the best intentions he couldn't speak their lingo.

A man of the world, a clubman, a man about town—all these he was. A good fellow, a fine pal—all his chums would tell you that—yet the sort of Smart Set, semi-fast people his wife enjoyed, were as utter strangers to him.

He had tried—tried to talk their small talk, laugh at their small jests, fathom their small souls—but, though

with no undue sense of his own importance—he couldn't make good from their point of view.

He set it all down to his own shortcomings, but the fact remained. And so as this was part of the rift, the Barhams had come to spend their evenings, as a rule, away from each other.

However, he had become pretty well used to it, and as he reached his Club he was in a more cheerful frame of mind. He went in with a smile, ran across good old Nick Nelson, and stopped in the smoking room for a chat with him.

Meanwhile, Madeleine, in her room, was doing some thinking. It was too early to dress and she had some other things to think out first, anyway.

At last she rose and went down the hall to her mother's rooms.

"Mother," she said, patting the fine white hair, "I——"

"I know what that means," and Mrs. Selden drew her head away from her daughter's caressing hand. "Now, Madeleine, I haven't a cent for you. It's outrageous, the way you go on. You know, very well, if Andrew had the least idea how you are managing, he would——"

"Yes, what would he do? He hasn't the power to do anything——"

"Don't be too sure. You know Andrew—but I know the world better than you do, I know men better than you do—and you needn't think that because Andrew never has broken loose, he never will!"

"Broken loose—how?"

"Reprimand you—disgrace you—punish you——"

"Disgrace! Punish! Mother, what do you mean?"

"Oh, hush up, child—don't think I don't know things! Andrew and I both spoil you—we're both too lenient with you—but—we both know——"

"Pooh! What do you know? Only that I lose a lot at Bridge! Well, I can't help it, if I have bad luck. I'm a first-class player—any one will tell you that. But I'm having a run of ill luck. Everybody has 'em, and they have to be followed by a streak of good luck. Everybody knows that. And when the good luck comes I'll pay back all I've borrowed from you or anybody else—and more, too. Now, come, Mother, be a duck and let me have at least a few hundreds."

"Madeleine, I can't."

"That means you won't."

"Take it either way you like—but you won't get any."

"Then I'll tell you what I think of you! I think you're a horrid old woman who refuses her own child—her only child, a few paltry dollars! You care nothing at all for my pleasure! You've feathered your own nest—or, rather I feathered it for you, by my marriage with a rich man! You have everything you want—ease, comfort, luxury—while I, a rich man's wife, haven't a cent to call my own!"

"Why haven't you? Because you've thrown it away gambling. Your husband gives you an enormous allowance—he even gives you extra money when you ask for it—and now, that you've reached the limit of his endurance and generosity, you come to me, to ask for the tiny sum I've saved——"

"Oh, have you, Mother? Have you saved a sum—do lend it to me, dearie? I'm sure I'll win to-night—and, besides, I'll tell you a secret—maybe—just maybe, you know, soon I won't have any trouble to get all the money I want——"

"Heavens, Madeleine, what do you mean by such talk? What are you going to do?"

"Nothing to make you look like that! Only—just maybe—Andrew will give me a lot of money."

"You're going to give up gambling? Is that it? Going to be more the sort of a wife he wants?"

"Maybe—" the pretty face wore a tantalizing smile—"anyway—I've a plan—a perfectly good, right plan. Oh, Mother, it's—but don't ask me, it's a secret—as yet."

"Where are you going to-night?"

"To Emmy Gardner's. But I'm going somewhere else first, and I'm in a hurry to get dressed. So, come across, old dear—that's a love!"

"Haven't got it," and Mrs. Selden returned to her newspaper, with a cold smile at her daughter.

"Mother! don't throw me like that! I tell you I *must* have it. I can't play to-night unless I pay a debt of last night. I haven't a cent myself—oh, how can you be so heartless!"

"Madeleine, behave yourself. I tell you I haven't more than ten or fifteen dollars in the house."

"I don't believe it"—and Madeleine began to rummage in her mother's dresser drawers.

"Stop that!" cried Mrs. Selden. "If you're so sure of winning to-night, they'll take your I.O.U. for last night's debts."

"That shows how little you know about it," and Madeleine sneered her scorn. "Mother, if you don't give me some money, you'll be sorry!"

"I'll be sorrier if I do. Good-night."

"I hate you!" and Madeleine ground her teeth in passion. "I hate you for a cruel, unnatural parent! I've a notion to turn you out of this house—you horrid old thing! You——"

"Oh, do hush. You act as you used to act when you were a child."

"And you treat me as cruelly as you did then! If you'd brought me up differently—I might have been a better

woman. Oh, you don't know yet how bad I can be—and I will, too—if you don't help me out this time!”

“Go to your room, and get over your tantrum. You'll get no money from me to-night.”

Mrs. Selden rose, and practically pushed her daughter through the doorway to the hall.

Madeleine went—seeing there was no hope of achieving her desire, but she went off muttering vengeance, and with a face white with passion.

In her boudoir again, she called her maid.

“Claudine,” she said, “you must lend me some money—just for this evening. Come now—there's a dear.”

“Willingly, Madame—but, alas, I have none.”

“That's not true—you were paid only yesterday.”

“But I sent it away—to my poor sister——”

“Claudine, you're lying. Now—see here—if you don't let me have some money—I'll tell your friend Carl about——”

“No, Madame—no, I beg of you——”

The French maid turned pale with apprehension, and looked beseechingly at her determined mistress.

“Yes, I will—I surely will! Now, you know you have some——”

“Only fifty dollars, Madame—as God is my witness, that's all I have.”

“Pah! that would do me no good at all! Keep your fifty—but, Claudine, get me Mrs. Sayre on the telephone. And after you get her—leave the room.”

“Yes, Madame.”

Madeleine stretched out on her *chaise longue*, smiled a little as she waited.

She looked like some sleek well fed cat, about to seize on its unsuspecting prey.

Perhaps students of such things would have said her

gambling instinct was an inheritance from some reckless, swashbuckling ancestor.

Others would hold, and more likely they were right, it was the result of the heedless, rushing pace set by the crowd with whom she lived and moved and danced and had her being.

Yet few of that crowd, if any, played so desperately, so feverishly or so continuously as Madeleine.

And none lost so much. Although really a fine player, she seemed one of those who have persistent bad luck, and if she won, she was quite likely to lose all her winnings on one last high-stake game before she stopped.

She loved the excitement of it, the hazard of it, the uncertainty.

And she had the optimism of the true gambler, who always thinks his luck just about to turn to better and to best, quite undaunted by the fact that it never does.

She reconnoitered. She was in desperate straits. If she didn't pay up last night's debts to-night, before beginning to play, her creditors, two unprincipled women, had threatened to tell her husband of the situation.

Andrew knew she played Bridge—frequently—almost incessantly—but he had no idea of the height of her stakes, or the terrific amounts she lost.

Always before, her mother had helped her out. Always before, she had won enough to tide over, at least. Always before—she had managed by hook or by crook to keep above water.

But to-night she was desperate. Something must be done—and done quickly.

"Mrs. Sayre on the wire," Claudine announced, and as Madeleine took up the receiver, the maid left the room.

"Hello, Rosamond," Madeleine said, "come over a few moments, can't you?"

"Why, hello, Maddy—what in the world for?"

"I just want to see you. Seems 's if I can't get along another minute without seeing you!"

The voice at the other end of the wire gave a short, quick sound of laughter, but there was an uneasy note in it—almost a note of alarm.

"Why, my dear old thing—I can't come now—I'm dressing. Aren't you going to Emmy's to-night?"

"Yes—but not till about eleven."

"I know—but I've an errand first."

"So've I. Look here, Rosamond, you'd better come over here. Slip into a little street frock and run over for a minute. You can walk it in no time—Harrison won't know you're out of the house."

"But why? Why must I do that?" The voice was petulant now, and Madeleine's became more commanding.

"Because I say so. Come along, now!"

She hung up the receiver with a snap, and summoned Claudine again.

"Dress me quickly," she commanded, "all but my gown. Do my hair small and plain. Yes—flesh-colored stockings."

The apt maid understood and with Madeleine's approval did the dark, soft hair into a compact mass that was becoming but not elaborate.

By the time the negligée was thrown over the silken undergarments there came a light tap at the door.

"That will be Mrs. Sayre," Madeleine said; "let her in, Claudine, and disappear."

"Well, sweetie, what's up?" and Rosamond Sayre dropped into an easy chair and lighted a cigarette.

"Just had to see you," returned Madeleine, falling back on the *chaise longue*. "How's your husband?"

"Harrison? Oh, he's all right."

"Funny little man— isn't he?"

"Yes—why?" Mrs. Sayre seemed in no wise offended.

"But fond of you?"

"As whose husband isn't—if the wife wants him to be?"

"And proud of you?"

"Why shouldn't he be?"

Rosamond Sayre looked at herself in a mirror.

"He'd be blind if he didn't see reason to be proud of me," she said, airily, flicking her cigarette ashes on the rug.

She gave an impression of absolute self-satisfaction. Her beryl eyes flashed with vanity, her great masses of gold-brown hair clustered over her ears and framed a piquant, bewitching face. Her dashing little figure and vivacious gestures betokened self-reliance, as well as self-approval.

"Come on, now, Maddy—out with it," she said; "I must run, in ten minutes, at most. Going to scold me, kid me—or borrow money of me?" She eyed her friend rather sharply.

"Good guesser!" Madeleine cried. "The third time conquers. I'm going to borrow money of you."

"Broke—haven't a cent!" and the beryl eyes showed darker glints in them.

"Pooh, don't come that over me. Harrison will give you a thousand in a minute—if you ask him prettily."

"But I wouldn't ask him—for you." Rosamond smoked calmly on.

"Oh, do now—Rosy, listen."

And then Madeleine talked and Rosamond, too, low and earnestly, and very steadily, for several minutes.

And Rosamond Sayre said, "All right—I'll bring you a thousand to-night—at Emmy Gardner's. Be there by eleven?"

"I think so; or a few moments later."

CHAPTER II

THE ARTISTS

THE pretentiousness of a studio, especially a Washington Square studio, is quite often in inverse proportion to the merit of the pictures it gives up.

But Tommy Locke's studio defeated this description by being a golden mean as to both propositions.

Indeed, Henry Post, the artist's cynical friend, said that Locke's draperies and his canvases showed a wonderfully similar lack of distinction.

And Kate Vallon had quickly added, "Let's call them his appointments and disappointments."

But Tommy Locke had only smiled comfortably and had gone on painting his interminable green and blue landscapes in which, if anybody cared for a certain vague misty charm—they did not find it entirely lacking.

And even if he had no high-backed, gilt-framed Italian arm-chairs and no armor or ragged priests' robes, he often had good-looking bowls of even better looking flowers and he served first-rate tea, and somehow the neighbors loved to drift in and out of his nondescript rooms.

His ways were ways of pleasantness and all his paths were peace, yet though his chums were usually tolerant and broad-minded thinkers, there was little real Bohemianism in evidence, that is, the Bohemianism of what is known as The Village.

His few worthwhile bits of old furniture stood upon worthwhile old rugs and his specimens of artistic junk were few and far between.

Yet, strangely enough, Tommy Locke himself affected the manner of the comic paper artist—at least, to a degree.

He wore his black hair a bit longer than other men, he wore his big round glasses with very heavy tortoise-shell frames, and he wore his collar soft and loose, with a flowing Windsor tie, usually black.

He was chaffed a bit now and then as to his inconsistencies, but it was generally admitted futile to try to get a rise out of old Tommy.

In fact he calmly stated that his get-up was the only real claim he had to being one of the noble army of artists, and Henry Post had glanced at the misty landscapes and murmured, "Some of your titles show latent talent, I think."

"It's so nice to be understood!" Locke had exclaimed. "Yes, I'll say my 'Monotony in Sagebrush' is both meanful and catching."

"If that's all you want you may well have called it 'The Mumps,'" Kate Vallon had reported.

These three and another, one Pearl Jane Cutler, formed a sort of chummy quartette, and, though they chummed but seldom, they did most of it in Tommy's non-committal studio.

"If you'd have a splash of color over that blank looking window," Kate would suggest, and Tommy would wave away the suggestion without a word.

Then would Pearl Jane, who was remarkably suggestive of Little Annie in *Enoch Arden*, say, plaintively, "I like it all—just as it is," and Tommy's beaming smile would be for her.

They had all finished laughing at her baptismal absurdity—she had been named for the two neighbors on either side of her mother's house—and without a nickname, they

accepted her as Pearl Jane. It was as yet a question what she would sign her masterpieces of art, as she hadn't, strictly speaking, produced them yet.

She hadn't been in the city very long, but Washington Square claimed her for its own. She loved it—all four sides—and many of its byways. She dabbled away, with a brush that was, so far, incompetent and irrelevant, but she cheerfully insisted that she was finding herself, and that some day she would paint pictures like Tommy's.

"Heaven forfend!" Post would cry out. "If you must copy, choose the billboard school, or the newspaper cartoon group, but don't take aim for Tommy's greenery dingles and blue glades."

"Beautiful title!" Tommy mused; "'The Blue Glades of Glengowrie'—I'll do that next."

"And that reminds me," Kate said, she was always being inscrutably reminded, "our infant here, our Pearl Jane, has never been to a masquerade! A real one, I mean. She doesn't count the Ivy Club Sociables in her Main Street home. Will you have one for her, Tommy? We'll all help."

"Better yet, I'll paint one for her," Locke said; "then she can see how one really looks."

"No, she can't," Post declared. "You see, in your pictures, so much more is meant than meets the eye—and Pearl Jane wants her eyes met."

"All right, then," and Locke thought a minute. "Not a very big one, you said, didn't you? And, no one asked but our own crowd, you insisted on, didn't you? And you stipulated it would be small and early—am I not right? And if I am not mistaken, you said there's no hurry about it."

But he was set right on all these points, and the masquerade party for Pearl Jane was arranged in exactly the

fashion Kate Vallon and Henry Post deemed fitting and proper.

However, their ideas were much in line with Locke's own, and so they made it only a few hours later and a few people larger than he consented to.

Pearl Jane was in ecstasies, and when the night came, and she was togged out in her Dutch Peasant costume, her already bobbed fair hair flying from under her stiff lace cap, she couldn't wait for the hour and ran round to Tommy's early.

She found him, garbed in a monk's robe and cowl, standing before an easel, gazing at one of his own pictures.

"Do you really like it, Pearl Jane?" he said, almost wistfully, as she came up and stood at his side in silence.

"Yes, I do. They can guy you all they like—there's something in your work—something of Manet—I mean Monet——"

"Eeny, meeny, miney, mo!" he laughed, and turned to look at her. "Why, bless my soul, madam, you've suddenly grown up!"

"No, that's 'cause this frock is longer than I usually wear. Do you like it?"

"Do blue and yellow make green? Yes, I like it. You're a picture!"

"What's the title?" asked another voice, and Kate and Post appeared.

"I think it might be called 'The Puritan's Carouse,' Locke said, wresting his glance from the pretty Dutch girl. "Hello, Kate, you're quite all right as a Contadina—Henry, not quite so good as a Spanish Don."

"Ah, I'm not a Spanish Don—your mistake. I'm a Portuguese Man o' War."

"You look more like an Oscar Wilde."

"Take that back! Call me anything but like that over-rated, underbred gyastyockus!"

"I thought he was a great poet," Pearl Jane said, wonderingly. "I never read any of his——"

"Don't!" Post said, "I forbid it. There's enough for you, yet unread, Pearl Jane, dear, without touching that Purple Jellyfish!"

"Some of his poems are fine," Kate began, but Locke interrupted her:

"Only one—'The Ballad of Reading Gaol' is a great poem, but nothing else of his is worthy of consideration."

Kate Vallon began to quote:

And all men kill the thing they love,
By all let this be heard,
Some do it with a bitter look,
Some with a flattering word,
The coward does it with a kiss,
The brave man with a sword.

"Oh, I hate it!" Pearl Jane shuddered. "If it's like that, I don't want to read it!"

"No, you don't," Locke agreed; "besides, he's out of date now. You stick to your John Masefield and Carl Sandburg."

"I don't know them very well," the girl acknowledged, "they're rather hard, I think."

Now Pearl Jane Cutler was by no means a child or an ignoramus. But she had been simply brought up in a small town, and though fairly well grounded in the rudiments of Life and Literature, she had still quite a bit to learn, and was swallowing it in chunks—anaconda like. She was twenty-two, and carried a little more flesh on her young bones than the average all-city girl did. Kate Vallon, half a dozen years older, was keeping an eye on her,

and she thought maybe, perhaps, possibly, after a thousand years of study, Pearl Jane *might* learn to paint something noisier than clay pots and onions.

Chinese Charley appeared in the doorway.

"They arrive," he said, a little laconically.

"Show them up," Tommy ordered, as succinctly, and then the quartette hurried on their masks and the revel began.

Locke was a little surprised at the stream of people that flowed in. He was not inhospitable, and there was room enough, but he thought Post might have told him what he was up to. He said as much to Henry Post, who responded:

"I didn't do it, Tommy, honest, I didn't. But several whom I did invite, just casually said they might bring friends. I couldn't say them nay—now could I?"

"Rather not," said Locke, and turned to greet some newcomers.

But, in his mask, and his concealing robe and cowl, almost no one knew him, and so he had no duties as host. This suited him well enough, and he sauntered about, looking at the hackneyed costumes, recognizing some figure here and there, or mistakenly thinking he did.

The studio looked festive to-night, for Kate and Henry had insisted on a few decorations and had chosen Chinese lanterns and artificial cherry blossoms. These delighted the soul of Charley, Locke's house-boy, and he gazed up at them, now and then, beatifically picturesque.

He was devoted to Locke, though so quiet of manner and scant of speech that there were no protestations, but he showed his affection in immaculate housekeeping and meticulous obedience to orders.

The place was not large; only the second floor entire, and a room or two on the first floor. Supper would be

served downstairs, so the big studio and one or two smaller rooms could be used for dancing. This left a small room for a smoking den, and Locke's own bedroom for a ladies' dressing room.

A small orchestra arrived and soon proved that it could make jazz music out of all proportion to its size.

Locke asked a Carmen to dance with him, thinking he knew her, but found he was again mistaken.

"Strange how merely a mask can disguise one so thoroughly," he said; "I'd think the face only a small part of a personality."

"Then it proves, practically, that the face is the whole individual," Carmen returned, turning her mask a trifle until he saw a lovely cheek and curving lips. "But as you've never seen me before, you couldn't be expected to know me."

"I didn't expect to, I merely thought you were someone else."

"I know almost no one here," Carmen said; "of course it makes no difference while we're masked, but at supper time I shall know nobody."

"That's all right, I'll introduce you about, and you'll have made dozens of friends among your partners by that time. . . ."

"Who are you, Sir Monk, tell me that, at any rate."

"My name would mean nothing to you—it's entirely uncelebrated."

"Tell me all the same"—the pretty voice was peremptory.

"Smith," he replied, "John Smith."

"And you call that name uncelebrated? One of the best known in the country. Fie, fie, Mr. Smith—just for that I shall call you John."

"And I may call you?"

"Mary—Mary Smith."

"Miss Smith, then. I never begin to call the ladies by their first names until midnight—at least."

"Tell me something—who is that woman in the gorgeous Oriental costume?"

"Where?"

"Over toward the hall door. See?"

"Oh, yes, I see. I haven't the faintest idea who she is. But as I say, they're all disguised from me. Besides, with this silly cowl, I can only see straight ahead! I might as well be a horse in blinders!"

"Can't you take it off?"

"And spoil my real Cistercian rig! Never! Besides, I haven't my tonsure on straight."

"Do you know the host?" Carmen asked, suddenly.

"Do you mean, do I know him? or, do I know which one he is?"

"Both."

"Yes, I am acquainted with him," Locke said, truthfully, and mendaciously added, "but I don't know which one he is. That Spanish Don, maybe. Don't you know Locke at all?"

"No, but I've heard a lot of him."

"Good, bad or rotten?"

"Not the last—they all say he's a trump. But queer."

"Queer, how?"

"Sort of a vagabond—goes off on jaunts by himself——"

"Painting?"

"I suppose so. Is his work any good?"

"Middling. Not very little and not very big. But I think he's happy in it."

"I'm only happy when I'm dancing."

"My heavens, I can't dance all night!"

"There are others! That's what I was hinting!"

"How prettily rude you are! That's the beauty of a masquerade—one can say anything."

"Can one? Then listen! I know you! I know who you are!"

"Do you?" said Locke. "Well, I'm not so overwhelmed at that! I know who you are!"

"Ah, but I'm telling the truth—and you're fibbing!"

And with a merry trill of laughter, Carmen disengaged herself from his clasping arm and ran away.

"Foolish chit!" Locke thought, and wandered about, looking for Pearl Jane.

The Dutch Girl was dancing with a Sailor Boy, and Locke stood to one side and watched them.

"Funny thing about Pearl Jane," he thought; "she's womanly—and all that—and yet she's little more than a child. Lucky she has Kate beside her—Kate's a trump. But Kate's party here to-night is rubbish! I am bored already. However, the kiddy wanted her *Bal Masque*, and now she's got it. I hope she's enjoying herself. I wonder what she'll grow up to. It will take a jolt of some sort to waken her. She's a dear thing—but—well, she's Pearl Jane!"

And then, he discovered he could claim her for a dance, and at once did so.

"How's the party?" he inquired, as they swung off.

"Oh, it's blissful! It's double-distilled Paradise!"

"There, there, save your adjectives! Don't be foolishly extravagant!"

"But don't you think so? Don't you just *love* it? All the lights and the people, and the jewels——"

"Mock jewels——"

"What of it? Don't be cynical to-night, Tommy—dear."

His heart missed a beat, as he caught something in her tone that he had never heard there before.

He must have shown his perception of it, for he saw a rosy blush beneath the edge of her little mask, and he hastened to say, "No, it doesn't matter that they're mock jewels—for they're mock people."

"Yes," she said, softly, "all but you and me."

Locke was nonplussed. He didn't know whether Pearl Jane was trying to make love to him, or whether the gayety of the occasion had gone to her head a little. He decided on the latter opinion, and steered the talk into a safer channel.

And yet, he couldn't help thinking, she was very sweet, the soft little chin that nestled against his shoulder, the curve of the cheek that still showed pink, and most of all the bright happy eyes that now and then met his through the eyeholes of their masks.

Clearly, he decided, I'd better get away from her. She'll enchant me in another minute—and that won't do. Little Pearl Jane! Waking up! Oh, Lord!

So, with a graceful bow, he handed her to a waiting and eager Clown, and sauntered off himself to do a duty dance with Kate.

Not but that he liked Kate Vallon, but after all, Locke was not overly fond of dancing, and he had a dim idea of retreating to the smoking room as soon as might be.

"Buck up," said Kate, after a few rounds, "you're a good dancer, Tommy, but you have no soul in it."

"I'd rather paint," Locke returned. "Wouldn't you, Kate?"

"Yes, I would. I'd rather do lots of things. But we're a few years older than Pearl Jane, or Henry, either. How old are you, Tommy?"

"Twenty-eight; why?"

"So'm I. Well, after twenty, nowadays, one gets fed up with dancing."

"Nonsense, lots of old ones love it. I never was keen about it. Want to sit out a while?"

"Yes, but not with you! Find Jack Henderson for me, won't you? He's a Continental Soldier."

Not at all minding Kate's candor, Locke went after the man she preferred. He looked about in the rooms, and then went downstairs in his search. The staircase was crowded, and as he passed a "Winter," he heard her say, "How very warm it is—I must have some air!"

He turned to see if he could be of assistance, but others were nearer her, so he went on.

He found Henderson and sent him to Kate.

"My, but I'm glad to be summoned," the cheery Henderson said, as he reached her. "I didn't dare intrude till I was sent for."

After a few moments they concluded the room was too crowded for chat, and they started for a tiny balcony that gave from a rear window.

"What's that?" cried Henderson, as they passed through the little smoking room, dimly lighted and now deserted.

"What's what?"

"That on the floor, behind the table!"

"Looks like a pillow from a couch," and Kate glanced toward some gay colored silk that lay in folds.

"It isn't! Kate—stay back!"

Henderson took another step, and gave a startled exclamation.

"Keep back, I tell you, Kate. There's been some awful accident. Call some one—some man. Call Locke and Post first. Wait, don't raise a general alarm. Get that Chinese servant."

"What is it, Jack? I will see! Oh, my God!"

Kate Vallon pulled herself together by strong will power.

"Who is it? Take off her mask!"

"I—oh, I can't! Get Locke—do, Kate!"

Kate ran through the rooms, and though she didn't see Locke just then, she saw Henry Post and bade him go at once to the smoking room.

He did so, and Kate continued her hunt for Charley, trying to keep from screaming out.

"What is it?" Post asked, coming into the dimly lighted room.

"Something terrible," Henderson said, gravely. "See here, Post, this woman is dead. I've felt her heart—and I tell you, man, she's dead."

"Who is she?"

"I've no idea. A stranger. I wouldn't raise her mask when Kate was here, but I've done so now, and I don't know her."

"My heavens! What shall we do? What ought we to do?"

"First get Locke. Also Chinese Charley. And as you go out, shut the door. I don't fancy being here alone—but you must shut the door to keep the women out. Then—oh, I don't know what then! Get Locke first."

Henry Post gone, Henderson again looked at the woman's features. She was beautiful, save for an awful wound where something had crashed down on her temple, and had surely killed her.

"What a strange accident!" Henderson thought. "If she had fallen against a fender now—but there's no mantel-piece in this room. I wonder if there's a doctor here. I ought to call one. It can do no harm to leave the poor thing alone for a minute—I won't go past the door."

Half uncertainly he rose and went to the door into the studio.

Slightly opening it, he asked the first man he saw to see if any doctor was present and would come to him at once.

"I'll get one," and the youth hurried away.

And in a moment he was back, with Doctor Gannett.

CHAPTER III

WHO WAS SHE?

HENDERSON admitted Doctor Gannett and stood nervously waiting as the physician stooped over the prostrate form.

Almost impatiently he pulled off the mask and tore away the filmy veil which still hid the lower portion of the face, and Henderson noticed with increased pain what a lovely face it was. Strangely enough, it was not highly colored artificially, indeed, it could scarcely be said to be made up at all.

Jack Henderson was impressionable and he turned his glance away as the doctor remorselessly, though gently, moved the wounded head and peered into the dead eyes.

Then the medical man looked up wonderingly and gazed around.

"What hit her?" he said, with a puzzled frown. "Unless she fell against something, she must have been—attacked—here, we have it!"

As he brushed aside the voluminous draperies of the Oriental costume he found that some folds of silk had covered what was without doubt the instrument of death.

It was a heavy bronze book-end, shaped like the head of a Sphinx. A quick glance showed the mate to it on the table near by.

"She was hit on the temple by this weight," the doctor said, gravely. "It is highly improbable that the bronze was on the floor and she fell on it—it looks far more like——"

"Don't say it!" Henderson cried. "Who could do such a thing? Here in Tommy's place?"

"It is certain that she did not fall on it," the doctor went on. "Had she done so, her head would be nearer the bronze. As you see, it was down by her knees—it was hidden by her tunic. It was used as a club——"

"Or as a missile," Henderson added.

The doctor looked up quickly. "You're sharp," he said. "Yes, or as a missile. And if the latter, it was a strong arm and an angry man who flung it!"

"Who is she?"

"I've no idea. But I know few people here. I just ran in for a few minutes at the invitation of a friend."

Doctor Gannett himself had worn a simple black domino, which he had already thrown aside, appearing in ordinary evening dress.

He turned from the body on the floor, and said, "We must notify the police. I think the best thing is to call in the officer on the beat and let him take charge. Where is Mr. Locke?"

"He will be here as soon as they can get hold of him," Henderson returned, beginning to wonder himself why he, who knew Locke only slightly, was thrust into this prominent position.

Gannett opened the door, to find many anxious, horrified people crowding about.

"Where is Mr. Locke?" he spoke, commandingly. "Bring him here, somebody. And somebody else ask the policeman outside to come in. If you don't see him promptly, telephone Headquarters. There has been a very serious accident. No one must leave the house until some investigation is made. And now, who knows the name of the lady who appeared in a very handsome Oriental cos-

tume, with many veils and scarves and jewels—and a turban with waving feathers?”

“White Paradise feathers?” asked an excited girl. “There was only one costume like that!”

“Yes,” and “I remember it!” and such assents fell from the lips of many.

The startled, huddled crowd, with ordinary human curiosity, strove to get nearer the door of the little smoking den, and the men who hurried to carry out the doctor’s orders pushed through as best they could.

Henry Post and Kate Vallon met these messengers in the hall downstairs.

“Where is Mr. Locke?” one said, as the other went for the policeman.

“I haven’t found him yet,” Post replied. “He must be about somewhere.”

“We must find him—they’ve called the police.”

“The police!” Kate exclaimed, “oh, what for?”

“I—I don’t know exactly—but nobody must leave the house.”

“Indeed we will leave the house!” Kate said. “Henry, I shall take Pearl Jane away at once. That child shan’t be mixed up in any police affair! You stay here, Henry, and find Tommy, and see the thing through. I’ll find Pearl Jane and take her home.”

“Better not,” the young man advised. He was a lawyer named Jarvis, and he seemed to speak with authority.

“Why?” asked Kate.

“It’s a pretty grave matter to leave a house where a mysterious death has occurred—after you’re ordered not to.”

“But that’s only Doctor Gannett’s order. Not the law.”

“You’d better stay,” Jarvis advised. “You’ll be inter-

viewed even if you run away—so why not face the music here?”

“I don’t mind for myself,” Kate said, slowly, “I’m thinking of Pearl Jane.”

“Little Miss Cutler?” Jarvis asked. “Where is she?”

“I don’t know—I can’t seem to find anybody. It’s queer where Tommy can be. And Charley—where can he have gone to?”

“Perhaps they’ve gone up to the smoking room by the back stairs,” Post suggested. “They’re doubtless there—because—because they aren’t anywhere else,” he concluded a little lamely.

“I didn’t know there was a back stairs,” Kate exclaimed. “Let us go that way.”

“Do you want to go back to—to that room?” Post said.

“Yes, I do,” Kate returned. “I want to stand by Tommy if there’s going to be trouble. But more, I want to find that child.”

“Perhaps she’s up there,” Jarvis suggested.

“Let’s go and see.”

But before they could start, an officer came in at the front door.

“What’s up?” he inquired, not greatly disturbed at the fact that all the people he saw were in fantastic costumes. Washington Square policemen are not easily surprised.

They told him, and Kate suggested the back stairs.

“No,” he said, and strode up the main staircase.

He stormed his way through the shuddering crowd, who willingly fell back for his passing, and opened the door of the smoking room.

Crossing to where the still figure lay, he gave a brief but comprehending glance at it, then after a few low words to Doctor Gannett, he said, “I’ll telephone the Precinct Sta-

tion—they'll send men. Where's the boss—the man of the house? Locke, isn't he?"

"Yes, do you know him?" Gannett asked.

"By sight, I see him now and then. Nice quiet chap. Who's the lady?"

"We don't know. But she was one of Mr. Locke's guests."

"All right. Now, look here, nobody must leave this house. Nobody must touch the body. Nobody more must come into this room. I don't say that woman was murdered—but it looks like that to me. So, doctor, go out and tell the people what I say—and hold them."

But Doctor Gannett found this no easy task.

Heedless of the law's commands, several insisted loudly that they were going home. Others slipped away stealthily. But many stayed because they were afraid to disobey orders, and some because they were held by curiosity.

Of course, all masks were removed, and some of those less interested in the "accident" as it was still called, began to drift toward the supper room.

Here they found the waiters had fled in terror, and they helped themselves to the viands.

"Shall I send the orchestra away?" Post asked the policeman, and he was permitted to do so.

"It's too dreadful," he said to Kate, "to have that jazz band sitting there silent."

"Where's Tommy?" was Kate's only reply.

"I'm going to find him," Post said, resolutely, and started on a systematic search of the premises.

And then the police came.

"I'm Inspector Dickson," one said, apparently speaking to any one who would listen. "Who's in charge here?"

No one answered, until Doctor Gannett said, "It's Mr. Locke's house, but we haven't located him yet."

Dickson gave him a sharp look, but asked no more questions.

Accompanied by two of his companions, a special detective and a deputy from the office of the Chief Medical Examiner, he went upstairs at once, while two plain clothes men took charge of the halls and stairway.

"Get busy, Doctor Babcock," Dickson said, and the examiner proceeded to his duty.

Detective Hutchins joined in the examination, and in only a few minutes they announced that the victim had been killed by the bronze book-end, thrown by some one else.

"Here's the other book-end on this table," Hutchins said; "presumably, the assailant stood here and threw the thing. It may be, however, that he lifted it from the table and moved nearer to his victim and merely hit her with it——"

"No; it was thrown," Doctor Babcock declared. "The nature of this abrasion on the temple proves that. It wasn't such a very hard blow—as it must have been, if effected nearer by. Indeed, if it hadn't struck just where it did, it would have made a bad bruise, but needn't necessarily have been fatal."

"But it was fatal," pursued the detective, "and it was the work of another. Therefore, it is homicide, and we must proceed accordingly. Where's the man of the house?"

Nobody answered, and the police all showed their surprise.

"Has he vamoosed?" asked Hutchins quickly. "Hunt for him, Briggs. You know him, don't you?"

Briggs, the officer first called in, said that he did, and he went on his search.

"Now until he's found, somebody must be at the head of

things," Hutchins went on. He went to the door of the studio and looked at the group of people remaining there.

Though the detective seemed unimpressed, it was a strange sight. The motley crowd, in the gay garments of the masquerade, yet all showing anxious, curious faces, was incongruous, even grotesque.

Young girls shuddered and drew nearer their escorts or the elder women. The men were deeply concerned—they understood better what must be before them.

"Until Mr. Locke appears," Hutchins said, in a stern voice, "who is his nearest relative or friend? Who will represent him for the moment?"

For a minute no one replied, and then Jarvis, the lawyer, said, "Not in any legal way, but as a friend of Mr. Locke, you may report to me. I am Rodman Jarvis—here is my card."

The man had come in the guise of a Troubadour. He had laid aside, with his mask, his feathered hat and his guitar. But he had brought his pocketbook and as he proffered the card, he seemed all conscious of his unusual costume. Nor was it unbecoming. A tall, well set-up young fellow, he was quite at ease, and deeply interested in the proceedings.

Hutchins looked at him steadily.

"You're a friend of Mr. Locke?"

"Yes."

"An intimate friend?"

"I shouldn't put it that way. But a good pal, and ready to do anything I can for him."

"Very well. Stay by me. Now, who of all you present can identify the lady who has been—injured? Surely some one here knows her."

No one responded, except those who declared they did not know her.

"You saw her only when masked," Hutchins said, reflectively.

"Yes," put in a vivacious young woman, "and besides her mask she had about seven veils round her face and throat! I might know her if I saw her face."

This was a new idea to the detective.

"True," he said; "I shall have to ask you all to look at her. At least, until some one can identify her."

It was soon arranged, and by permission of the examiner the body was laid on the divan in the smoking room. Hutchins took good care to shut off by chairs the part of the room where it had lain, for it seemed to his quick eye there was much to be learned from the conditions there. Already he had noted a cigarette end, and many spangles.

But he had much to do, and such investigation could wait.

Dickson and the detective directed the line of people that must pass by the divan and tell all they knew concerning the pathetic figure that lay there.

The scene was appalling. Girls became hysterical, women sobbed violently, and even the men were deeply agitated. The masquerade costumes only accented the horror, and like a strange, weird pageant the line filed by.

Toward the last came Kate Vallon and Henry Post.

They had not found Tommy, neither had they found Chinese Charley.

And, worst of all, they had not found Pearl Jane.

Post tried to comfort Kate by saying that he was sure the girl had run away home, but Kate was not so sure of this.

They could only wonder at the absence of all those they had searched for.

As these two reached the divan each looked long and earnestly at the dead woman.

They saw a sweet young face, pretty and natural. The contusion did not show, as the doctors had turned the head on that side.

The eyes were closed, and the cheeks showed a slight tinge of rouge. The lips were not made up at all, and were already pale.

The costume was exquisite. The finest type of Oriental magnificence, with full silk trousers, a voluminous tunic, dainty bodice and jacket, all of rich, soft silk, in gorgeous coloring and ornamented with glittering sequins and mock jewels.

On her hands beside a wedding ring, were several gaudy paste gems, quite evidently part of the costume. All of her head-gear had been removed and her hair, though disordered somewhat, was soft and plentiful.

On her feet were jeweled and embroidered Turkish slippers and fine silk stockings.

"How lovely!" was Kate's involuntary exclamation. "But, who is she?"

"I've not the faintest idea," Post said; "I've never seen her before, I'm sure of that. And I don't believe Tommy ever did, either—she isn't our sort, Kate. As to Tommy's skipping—nonsense—he's taken Pearl Jane home—that's where he's gone."

And no one on the line of spectators knew the unfortunate woman.

Hutchins was shrewd and he watched eagerly to find some one who seemed to dissemble, or who seemed ill at ease beyond the natural horror of the occasion. But he found none such, and after the ordeal was over, he was convinced, that so far he had neither any clue to the identity of the criminal nor the victim.

Dickson sighed. He was up against a hard case, and the odds were against him. His men were searching high and low for the man of the house, and for his servant. He didn't believe that Locke had merely gone to escort a guest home. If he were the right sort of a man he would have sent some one with her and remained himself at his own home.

Hutchins agreed to this, and leaving the room by the back way he began a search himself.

As he closed the door behind him, his quick ears caught a stifled sob.

It seemed to come from a closed closet, and, throwing open the door and, striking a match, simultaneously, he discovered some one huddled among a lot of canvases and artists' odds and ends.

"Come out! Who are you?" he ordered, sharply, but changed his tone as he clutched at the arm of a trembling girl.

"Oh," she sobbed, "oh, what shall I do?"

"Do, miss? Why, just come out, and tell me who you are. Don't be afraid of me—if you've nothing else to be afraid of! What's your name?"

"I'm Miss Cutler," and, somehow, meeting this crisis seemed to give her back her nerve. "I was—I was frightened—so—so I hid."

"I see you did," Hutchins remarked, dryly, his own sympathy for her waning, as she recovered her poise. "Why did you do it?"

"Do what?"

"Hide—of course. You didn't do anything else—did you? Nothing wrong, now?"

"No, of course I didn't!" she began gravely, but broke down again and sobbed.

"May I go home? Oh, please let me go home."

"You can go pretty soon. I see you were at the party."

The Dutch Peasant costume, though still effective, was crumpled and wet with tears, and, though Hutchins' heart almost stood still as he saw it, there was certainly a small stain on the sleeve that looked like blood.

Without another word he drew her quickly into the den, and took her straight to the divan.

"Miss Cutler," he said, as he grasped her arm firmly, "did you kill that woman?"

"No!" she shrieked, and fainted away.

"No need to be brutal, Hutchins," Doctor Babcock cried, as he took the unconscious girl into his charge.

"Why, it's Pearl Jane!" cried Miss Vallon. "Henry, here she is! Where did you find her?"

Kate spoke to the doctor, not having heard Hutchins' question to the girl.

"She was hiding in a back closet," the detective answered her. "I must hold her—till she can explain some matters. Keep her by you, Doctor. Or let Dickson do it. I'm off to find Locke now." And again the detective started down those back stairs.

"Well," Dickson looked sadly at his wits' end. "This is sure a mysterious case. Here's a dead woman and nobody knows who she is, or who did for her. Next, there's nobody to make a report to—except that lawyer chap—and he seems to me a little bit too smart. Yes, he is, a little *too* smart."

Dickson was talking to the Medical Examiner, who had succeeded in restoring Pearl Jane to her senses, but wouldn't yet allow her to talk.

They were in the smoking room, which they kept cleared of all save those they wished to interview. The studio

and halls were guarded and policemen were stationed outside the house, which no one was as yet allowed to leave or enter.

An officer from outside came to Dickson.

"Here's a go," he said; "there's a swell car out there, and the chauffeur says he has orders to wait for his missus, and she hasn't come out and he wants to know if she can be let to go."

"Who is his mistress?"

"Mrs. Barham—Mrs. Andrew Barham."

"Oh, the society people. I've heard the name. Well, get Mrs. Barham from the studio and let me speak to her."

In the studio a plain clothes man was industriously taking the names and addresses of the guests, preparatory to dismissing some of them at least.

As yet he had not the name of Mrs. Barham, and no one responded to his query for it.

"Maybe she went home," some one said. "A few did go."

"She would have gone in her car, then," the officer argued; "the chauffeur has been waiting here since before eleven."

"What time is it now?"

"Eleven-thirty. I say," he jerked his head over his shoulder, "maybe that's her!"

"Get the chauffeur up here," the other said, gravely.

And when he arrived he was asked concerning the costume his mistress wore when he brought her to the house.

"I don't know, sir," Louis said; "she had on a large dark cloak."

"Don't waste time," said Dickson, shortly. "Show him the body."

So Louis, the chauffeur of Madeleine Barham was taken in to look at the still figure in the Oriental garb.

"It is Madame," he said, startled into a scared trembling.

"Her name?"

"Mrs. Andrew Barham."

CHAPTER IV

AN UNKNOWN GUEST

Sobs were checked and hysterics forgotten in an intense and burning curiosity.

Mrs. Andrew Barham—here—at Tommy Locke's party!

It could scarcely be believed.

They stared at the imperturbable chauffeur. It was plain to be seen that the man was deeply moved, but his training prevented any expression of grief or excitement.

"Does any one here know Mr. Barham?" Hutchins inquired.

He stood in the doorway between the studio and the den, or smoking room. Indeed, the interest had become so intense it was almost impossible to set a barrier to such as insisted on forcing a way.

But the detective had guards watching the places and people he was most interested in.

No one did—that was clear. And no one knew Mrs. Barham personally, though nearly all had heard her name.

"But to be here, she must have been somebody's friend," Hutchins persisted. "I find that there were perhaps fifty invited guests—and I'm told there were perhaps about sixty-five or seventy people here. So many invited guests brought friends or asked them. It may be that was the way Mrs. Barham came—so who brought her?"

It was impossible to get any other than negative replies.

The only conclusion to be drawn was that Mrs. Barham came to the party as the guest of some one who had

already gone home. Which added a further inexplicable mystery. Why should the person or persons who brought Mrs. Barham run away in this emergency?

Why should Mrs. Barham have come at all, save as a happy guest in quest of pleasure? Could she have been trapped there?

No; for she came from her own home in her own car. Moreover, she wore a handsome and expensive costume, quite evidently in view of the masquerade festivity.

And, though no one could tell the exact time she arrived, several agreed that she had been at the house at least an hour before the tragedy was discovered.

Hutchins instructed his men to get from Miss Vallon a complete list of all the people invited, whether they had come or not.

Then he said, "Next, I suppose, we must notify Mr. Barham. How shall we best do it, Dickson?"

"Telephone, of course. Is Mr. Barham at home, Louis?"

"I don't know, sir. I am only chauffeur of Madame's car."

"Who are in the family?"

"Only Mr. and Mrs. Barham, and Mrs. Selden, the mother of Madame."

"What's the number?"

Louis told, and then Dickson said, "You do it, Hutchins. Be as decent as you can. You've more natural tact than I have."

"Is there any other telephone?" Hutchins asked, looking at the gaping crowd, in their carnival dress.

"Yes," Post told him, "in Mr. Locke's bedroom. I'll show you."

They went to the bedroom and Post stood by, while Hutchins called the Barham house.

A servant answered, and the detective asked for Mr. Barham.

"He's in bed and asleep; shall I call his valet?"

"No; waken him. It's an important matter."

And in a few moments a voice said, "Andrew Barham speaking."

"Is—is your wife at home, Mr. Barham?"

Hutchins hadn't intended to begin that way, but he was a sensitive sort, and he dreaded making the bare announcement of his news.

"Who is this? Why do you ask?"

"It is a grave matter. Kindly reply."

"No, then, she is not. It is now quarter of twelve. She is out with some friends."

"I have bad news for you, Mr. Barham. This is the police speaking—Detective Hutchins. Your wife is here—at the friend's house—injured, sir—fatally injured."

Hutchins heard a slight gasp, and then a hurried, "I will get there as quickly as I can. At Mrs. Gardner's?"

"Mrs. Gardner's! No. At Mr. Locke's!"

"Where?" The question rang out like a shot. "Who is Mr. Locke?"

"That's where she is, sir. Mr. Thomas Locke, Washington Square."

"My wife at Mr. Locke's! I cannot understand—but never mind, man, I'll be right down there. Give me the exact address—and stay—what is the injury—tell me a word or two——"

"She hit her head—sir—really—I think you'd better come along at once. It's a party—a masquerade party——"

"Are you crazy? My wife isn't at any masquerade party!"

"Yes, she is—come on, please."

"I will. Wait a minute—must I face the whole crowd of revelers?"

"I understand. No, Mr. Barham. Come—let me see—come to the front door but ask the man in charge to bring you up the back stairway."

"Oh, it needn't be as secret as that—but—I can't seem to think coherently. Washington Square! I'll be there in record time."

With his usual efficiency and avoidance of all waste motion, Andrew Barham had summoned his valet, and his chauffeur, and had ordered his car while he was getting into his clothes.

Prall, the valet, came in to find him already almost entirely dressed.

With a few quick, somewhat jerky words, he explained the situation to his trusted servant, saying, "Come with me, Prall, I think it's very serious."

Awed by the look on his master's face, Prall bowed a silent assent, and in the shortest possible time, they were speeding down the Avenue, careful only to avoid a hold up by the traffic squad.

"Did you ever know of Mrs. Barham's going to any place on Washington Square, Prall?"

"Never, sir."

And Andrew Barham wondered.

Madeleine had said he was always wondering, but surely he had never before had such occasion for wonderment. Madeleine, at a fancy dress ball—in Washington Square, and—hurt—didn't that man say fatally hurt?

To be sure, Madeleine went where she chose—she had her own friends—but Barham knew who they were, if he didn't know them personally; and they were of her own circles, most certainly *not* of a Washington Square type.

So he wondered, blindly, and at last they were there.

Barham hurried up the steps, quite forgetting to ask for the back staircase.

In fact, the sight of several policemen about, so took away his wits, he thought of little else for the instant.

Before Barham arrived, Hutchins had arranged things to give the least possible shock. Henry Post had been put on duty downstairs to see that no one took advantage of the detective's absence to get away. Pearl Jane had been ensconced in Locke's bedroom with Kate Vallon to look after her.

In the room with Mrs. Barham's body were only the members of the Police Force, Doctor Gannett and Rodman Jarvis, who still expressed his willingness to act for Locke in any way he could.

Chinese Charley was still missing, and the officer who admitted Barham took him at once to the back stairs.

"It's very bad, sir, and there's a horde of curiosity seekers in the studio. This way, sir."

Barham had directed Prall to accompany him, as he might need service of some sort.

The officer stumbled a little on the narrow dark stairs, and Barham impatiently passed him, exclaiming, "Hurry, man—I must see for myself!"

The first time, Prall observed to himself, he had ever seen the master excited. "And small wonder," he added, as he himself began to feel a sense of horror.

Knowing better than to try to break such news slowly, Hutchins merely greeted Andrew Barham with a grave nod, and said, "There she is, sir."

And Andrew Barham looked down on the body of his wife—whom he had seen last at dinner that same night—now, in gaudy array, and cold in death.

The man seemed turned to stone. At first his face showed incredulity, stark unbelief—then as he realized the

truth of what his eyes told him he seemed to paralyze—he was utterly incapable of speech or action.

A fine looking man, the detective saw. Straight, strong, vital. His hair was light brown—almost golden—and had a curly wave in it that gave charm to an otherwise stern cast of features.

His eyes were gray-blue, and now they were so blank, so dazed, as to have almost no expression whatever.

It was the man, Prall, who moved first.

He had stood beside his master, wondering, staring, and then all at once he broke into deep sobs and turned away to hide his face.

It seemed to galvanize the other, and Andrew Barham gave a strong shudder as he tried to pull himself together.

"It is my wife," he said, turning to the detective. "What do you know about it? How came she here? We do not know this place."

"Mrs. Barham must have known, sir. She came in her own car, with her own chauffeur."

"Louis! Is he here?"

"Yes, Mr. Barham."

"It is a mystery. I do not understand at all. But this is my wife—and—she is dead. Was she—was it an accident?"

"We do not think so."

And then Doctor Gannett gave his account of the finding of the body on the floor——

"On the floor?" Barham interrupted. "Just where?"

He was shown, and he wondered more than ever.

"With this book-end," he mused, "this bronze Sphinx. You say it is not possible that it was an accident? That she fell on it—she was on the floor——"

"No"; and Doctor Babcock added his own testimony to Gannett's.

Barham drew a long sigh, and brushed his hand across his eyes.

"Then," he said, and he looked at the policemen in turn, as if arraigning them, "then you conclude it was—murder?"

"We do, sir," Dickson answered.

"Then move heaven and earth to find out who did it! Spare no time, pains or expense. Who would—who *could* have reason to kill a woman like that? But, strangest of all is her presence in this place, that has yet to be explained. Everything has yet to be explained. Are any of her friends here—in the other room?"

"No, Mr. Barham, everybody in the other room declares he or she never saw Mrs. Barham before."

Again the man seemed so blankly bewildered as to be on the verge of losing his mind.

But he wasn't. Andrew Barham was unutterably amazed, astounded—but he wasn't yet dazed. His mind was thinking with lightning quickness.

"Who did it?" he demanded again. "You must have some suspicion—some slight clue!"

"We have no suspicion, Mr. Barham," Hutchins told him, "and as to clues or evidence, we've not been able to go into those things yet. Think, it only happened less than two hours ago."

"Less than two hours ago! Then why wasn't I told sooner?"

"Because nobody knew who she was."

"Nobody knew my wife! In a house where she had come as a guest!"

"No, nobody knew her."

"The host? Didn't he know her?"

"The host—Mr. Locke, cannot be found."

Andrew Barham dropped into a chair.

"Do you know you are telling a very strange story to me?"

"It is a strange story, Mr. Barham. But it is all true. Mr. Locke cannot be found—nor can Charley."

"Who is Charley?"

"A Chinese boy—Locke's servant."

"Do you think it might be, then, that my wife came to the wrong house? I have heard of such mistakes."

"That might be. But this is the address she gave her own chauffeur."

"May I see Louis?"

The chauffeur was brought in and told his tale with the same immovable calm he always displayed.

He addressed himself to Barham.

"Madame ordered her car for nine-thirty," he said.

"She bade me drive her here. I did so. When she alighted, she told me to be here for her, a little before eleven, as she was then going to Madame Gardner's. I was here shortly before eleven and waited a little distance away. While I was waiting, there seemed to be some commotion—several people left this house hurriedly, and some policemen came."

"You sat still and waited?" put in Hutchins, hastily.

"Why not? It was the order. And I knew not but it was apartments and the police had naught to do with the home Madame visited. Yes, I waited, until maybe half after eleven, then the commotion grew more—and I began to feel fear. I came to the door and asked for Madame. The rest is known."

Louis was the perfect French chauffeur. His manner and mien showed just the right shade of grief, without being unduly or presumptuously personal.

Hutchins watched him out of the corner of his eye. He didn't always trust French chauffeurs.

Barham, who seemed to read the detective's mind, said, "You may depend on Louis's story. He is absolutely reliable."

There was a silence. Andrew Barham was thinking deeply.

At last he said, "What must be the procedure? I am at a loss to know what I am to do."

For the first time Rodman Jarvis spoke.

"It is a most unusual case—we all see that. But, speaking as a lawyer, I want to ask you, Doctor Babcock, as Medical Examiner, if you can't waive certain technical considerations and let Mr. Barham remove his wife's body to-night—if he wishes to do so."

Barham gave the young man a grateful look.

"That is just what I do want," he said, "but not unless it is a proper and legal proceeding. I am shocked and horrified enough as it is, without leaving her here any longer than is absolutely necessary. If she could be taken to the Funeral Director's—or to my home—yet, stay, Mr. Dickson, nothing—no consideration of my feelings or anything else, shall be done that will put a straw in the way of finding the murderer. That must and shall be done!"

His voice almost rang out in this decision, and Hutchins reassured him quickly.

"No, Mr. Barham, that won't matter, that way. It's only that it's a bit hasty to turn over the body to the relatives before a step has been taken to solve the mystery. Yet, it can be of no help to retain the body. The doctor's reports are full and complete, and there is little or no evidence to be learned from the body itself. If necessary to see it again that can be done at the undertaker's—better there than at your home. And if an autopsy is held——"

Hutchins checked himself. He was expert in trying to

carry on his detective work and yet spare the feelings of the bereaved ones, but he frequently fell into error.

However, Andrew Barham took it rationally.

"Yes, Mr. Hutchins, if an autopsy is indicated, it can be performed. May I then send for the funeral people? May my man Prall telephone for them? I have ahead of me the difficult task of breaking this news to my wife's mother. And, as you can understand, it has shaken me terribly."

One and all they admired him. As man to man, Barham had a fine, a sensible attitude. It was plain to be seen how shocked and grieved he was, it was clearly evident that he was holding on to his composure by mere will power, and every one present wanted to favor him in every possible way.

"You know where to find me," he went on. "Here is my business card—I am a consulting engineer, and though I have several business engagements out of the city, for the immediate future, I shall, of course, cancel them all. Prall, call the funeral company, and ask them to come here as soon as may be."

"There's no use asking you any more about Mrs. Barham's movements this evening," Dickson said, "for you know even less than we do. You frequently spent your evenings in different places?"

"Yes," and Barham showed no embarrassment at this query. "We had not altogether the same tastes, and Mrs. Barham had her own car and latchkey, as I have. So we came and went as we chose."

"When did you see her last, Mr. Barham?"

"At dinner this evening. We dined alone—with only my mother-in-law. After dinner, Mrs. Barham went to her rooms to dress for some party, and I went to my Club."

"What Club was that, sir?"

"The Players'. Don't hesitate to ask all the direct questions you wish. I know how necessary they are."

But this willingness seemed to take away Dickson's desire to make inquiries, and he only said, "There's plenty of time ahead for all that."

"There will be an inquest?" Barham asked.

"Yes; but don't feel obliged to attend, Mr. Barham, unless you like. I can arrange so that you needn't."

"Oh, yes—I propose to help with this search for the criminal. And I can do it better if I follow the course of the inquiries. But I can do it better yet, if I can sometimes follow them unobserved. I will, therefore, if I see fit, sit in the back of the room, or some obscure corner. You see—" he set his fine white teeth together in a determined way—"you see, somebody did this thing—you are sure—" he broke off suddenly to say to Doctor Babcock, "you are positive it could not have been an accident?"

"Positive."

"I ask again, because I didn't see the body when it was on the floor. And—I confess I would rather it had been an accident. Who could have wanted to put an end to the life of my young and beautiful Madeleine?"

It was the first time he had spoken thus—as if he were alone—but he quickly resumed his outer manner of composure.

"Then if you are sure, there was a murderer—find him!"

His tone was that of an ultimatum, his air one of finality, and rising, he began to pace the room.

Nor did he speak again until he was informed that the undertaker's men had arrived.

Then he superintended the removal of the body himself, he went downstairs without so much as a glance at the few curious ones who were rude enough to peer out from the

studio door at him, and after the box that held the wife he had loved was put in place, he went home in Madeleine's car, leaving Prall to go with the undertaker in Barham's own car.

"Don't arrange for the funeral, of course, Prall," he said, as a final order. "Just see that everything is done right, and when you can, go home and go to bed. I'll look after myself."

"Thank you, sir," said Prall.

The police officers looked at each other.

"There's a man for you!" Dickson said, and Hutchins heartily agreed.

"He's a real man," Jarvis put in. "He thanked me for what I had done, with tears in his eyes, and I haven't done anything."

"Yes, you did, Mr. Jarvis," Babcock said; "I should have kept that woman here all night, if you hadn't turned up. But it's a relief to the poor man to get that part of it over with, I know. Now to get rid of the bunch in the next room and to get rid of them properly. They ought to be interrogated as well as just to get their home addresses."

"They have been, mostly," Jarvis said. "I slipped in there while you were talking with Mr. Barham, and the men were working fast. Mr. Barham was completely bowled over, wasn't he? I can't get his face out of my mind."

"Yes, and he took it like a man," Doctor Gannett said. "I have had to tell many a man that his wife was dead, and I never saw a braver attitude. And he loved her—you could tell that the way he looked at her. I could."

Then the police, by rather slow degrees, dismissed the waiting guests, and the Clowns, the Knights, the Juliets

and the Winters with their cloaks drawn about their gaudy array, went out into the quiet Square.

"Do you want to stay here all night, Miss Vallon?" Hutchins asked, kindly. "Would you rather keep the young lady here? I must tell you that I have to question her to-morrow morning—sorry, but it can't be helped."

"Oh, no, indeed!" Kate cried. "I wouldn't stay here for anything! I never want to enter this house again! But I will take Miss Cutler home with me, and you may see her at my house whenever you wish."

Hutchins agreed to this, and Henry Post, looking very weary, came to escort the two girls home.

"I'm about all in," he admitted; "I never was so done up."

"What do you think—" Kate began.

"I'm too tired to think at all," he returned, and they went home in almost complete silence.

CHAPTER V

HUTCHINS INVESTIGATES

"Now," Hutchins said, "we can get to work on a real investigation. Of conditions, I mean. Had to do up the possible witnesses first. But they were all impossible witnesses! I never saw a lot of people who knew less—or pretended to."

"First," Inspector Dickson remarked, calmly, "we'll eat. There's a fine layout in the pantry, and we may as well put some of it to use. Call in Briggs and any others of our men."

So, instead of funeral baked meats coldly furnishing forth a marriage table, the pleasant little supper ordered for Tommy Locke's guests regaled the hearty members of the Police Force.

Afterward the two principals made a tour of the place.

In the main, they found little of interest. The usual furniture of a bachelor's studio quarters; of a man, apparently neither rich nor poverty-stricken. The appointments were plain and far from being over-abundant, yet the place was comfortable.

Small gilded chairs from the caterer's had, of course, been hired for the occasion, as had a long hatrack in the hall and a similar one in the ladies' dressing room.

This room interested Hutchins, being, as it was, Locke's bedroom.

"It ought to give us a line on the man's personality," the detective said, hopefully.

But it was not very indicative. The clothing in the wardrobe and the simple toilet articles only gave evidence

of a decently tidy man of moderate tastes in every way.

"Colorless chap," Hutchins said, disgustedly; "hardest kind in the world to trace. Now, if he had frisky pictures on his walls, or Bolshevik books hidden in his dresser, we might look for something decided. But these everydayish, plain American citizen fellows—where are you?"

"If he's an artist, he ought to have some personality," Dickson suggested.

"Probably has, as to temperament and all that. But I don't believe he's much of an artist—I've never heard the name—have you?"

"No; but there are hundreds of artists within two blocks of this place whose names haven't been heard around the world—as yet. Let's look in the bathroom—may surprise his secrets there."

"Nixy!" and Hutchins looked his discouragement. "I deduce that he is a man who uses soap and water, who shaves himself with a safety razor, and uses pumice stone on his teeth."

The last after a peep into a small jar on the glass shelf.

"Well, then to the scene of the crime next."

"You see," Hutchins explained, as he drew away the protecting chairs, "I fenced this place off because I thought those hoodlums would trample it, like cattle on a picnic field. But it seems to be intact. Yet I daresay it will show up just about nothing."

"Mostly spangles," Dickson observed, looking at the glittering specks on the rug.

"Are they from that rig of Mrs. Barham's?"

"No"; Dickson knew more about these things than Hutchins. "No, hers were iridescent—these are silver-colored—tin, probably."

He picked up a few.

"Save them, anyway—put them in an envelope—gather all you can. Probably they are off of more than one gown. Now, here's a long white glove—but that might belong to anybody."

"Save it—it's a possible clue. Well, here are two cigarette stubs—women never care where they throw them! and here are three hair-pins—all different. Here's a man's glove, a dagger——"

"A dagger!"

"Oh, just a tinsel one—out of some Spanish girl's hair—it will bend if you look at it."

"Keep it. It shows the presence of your Spanish girl on the scene."

"Probably before the crime. You see, Dickson, this place, near the divan and table, was a favorite lounging spot, and they all drifted in here between dances. Then it was doubtless during a dance that the crime occurred, when this room was practically deserted, and also when that Jazz racket would drown any sounds."

"That's right so far, Hutchins. But get all the scraps here you can—for among them must be the clues left by the murderer—if any."

"Yes, if any! Well, here's a fan and a mask——"

"A mask!"

"Yes, why's that strange?"

"Because no one had as yet unmasked! It isn't Mrs. Barham's—she had hers on when they found her."

"Oh, it's an extra then. It's just a tiny black domino, with a lace frill——"

"A woman's, then?"

"Not necessarily. The men who wore fancy-fiddly costumes, like cavaliers or troubadours, wore this sort of mask."

"Maybe it's young Jarvis's. He was a troubadour."

"All right, we'll keep all the flotsam and jetsam—there's nothing else, but a few beads and a small, trumpery vanity case—not a gold one.

"Mostly women's stuff."

"Yes, but men don't have many loose trifles to shed. Now, what about this white streak on the rug? About six inches long——"

"Looks like face powder—probably from that vanity case."

"Maybe. Now, here's one spot of blood—poor lady. There was little of that—it was contusion rather than abrasion, though the skin was broken."

"Reconstruct, Hutchins. Can you see the murderer standing here—or here?"

Dickson seriously moved from spot to spot.

"No," Hutchins declared positively, "he stood about here. The other side of the table from his victim. I see them quarreling—perhaps she was repelling his advances—and he, in a sudden, uncontrollable fit of anger at something she said, fired the thing—almost involuntarily."

"Yes, it must have been something like that. Now, do you suppose it was Locke?"

"Who else?"

"Why not Charley? Orientals have strong passions."

"But why would a Chinese servant have anything at all to do with a grand society lady?"

"I don't know, of course, but he might have. Suppose he had been her butler—and she had unjustly accused him or discharged him—anyway, on the other hand, what could the grand lady have to do with an uncelebrated young artist?"

"Idle speculation, all of it. Let's take a look at our facts. We have the wife of Andrew Barham murdered at

a party in the studio apartment of Thomas Locke. Deduction, they were acquainted."

"No; many guests brought uninvited friends."

"Then where is Locke? Unless he knew this woman, whether he killed her or not, why would he disappear a few moments after the crime?"

"I think he went away for some innocent reason——"

"Such as?"

"I can't think of any, I admit."

"No; he didn't run out to get more sugar for the lemonade. Now, I can't figure it out exactly, but as near as I can gather, the lady was killed at about ten or a little after. Maybe quarter after. But, at what must have been nearly half past ten, Briggs, the policeman on beat, saw a man who he thinks was Locke, come out of this house, walk down the front steps, calmly but quickly, and then walk rapidly over toward the Avenue.

"Briggs thought nothing of it at the time—didn't even think of its being Locke, for he knew of the party, but he's been ruminating since and now he's almost sure it was Locke."

"Look here, Dickson, these surenesses, after the incident becomes important, are to taken with a grain of salt."

"I know it. If Briggs had been sure from the first—it would be different. But when he learns that Locke is missing, it is easy to imagine that the man he saw leave this house looked like him. Of course, Locke wouldn't leave the house during the party, unless it *was* because he is the criminal. But I can't suspect him on that tale of Briggs', coming late, as it does. Still, it's a thing to remember. What did Locke wear as a fancy garb?"

"A Monk's robe, I'm told, with a deep hood or cowl."

"He couldn't go out in the street with that on. If

he ran away he must have left the rig in the house. Let's rake for it."

"Oh, set one of those chaps downstairs at the job. I'm tired—physically—and anyway, we'll get farther by thrashing this thing out verbally between us. Go on, you were collecting your facts."

Hutchins called an assistant, and bade him search the house for Locke's monkish garb, and then he resumed:

"Well, I think that constitutes my entire exhibition. Mrs. Barham is murdered and Locke is missing. Have you anything further to add?"

"Chinese Charley is missing also."

"Yes. Now we have nothing that can be rightly called evidence, and very few, if any clues. I can't care much for these ripped off spangles, and dropped gloves. The studio is full of such things. At a masquerade, the costumes fairly rain tinsel and fringes. But I do think, Hutchins, that this is a big case. I do think there's a lot behind the present aspect, and it is not going to be easy to ferret it out."

"Do you suppose for a minute I thought it would be?" the detective growled. "Well, how shall we set about it?"

"First—and I don't mean to do it first—but of first importance, is to locate Locke. Second, learn the details of Mrs. Barham's past. On those two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

"And after those two trifling errands are attended to, what next?"

"Don't be pettish, Hutchins. You've never had a bigger chance for good work. Go to it. Keep your sweepings and doodads, but also put in a lot of headwork and energetic search. As soon as possible interview the little Dutch girl—though I don't think she had a hand in the crime."

"She had her sleeve in it then—I saw a smear on it that looked like blood."

"Oh, I don't believe it was. More likely red rouge or lipstick."

"Maybe. Anyway, I may get something about Locke from her and the Vallon girl. They are thick with him—and Henry Post is too."

"That's the dope. Then as soon as it's late enough for society people, I suppose you'll go up to the Barhams' house."

"Yes; I suppose so. Yet what can he tell me? That man was flabbergasted. There was no make-believe about his utter astonishment at finding his wife in this house."

"I agree to that. Now go home and get some sleep—unless you'd rather bunk here?"

"I believe I will. I'll appropriate Mr. Locke's bedroom and bath and then if his nibs returns stealthily in the small hours, I'll be here to receive him."

"Very well, I'll go home. Get around to the Vallon place as early as they'll let you, and then make for the Barhams'."

Snugly ensconced in Tommy Locke's bed, Hutchins found that he could rest but he couldn't sleep.

So he let his mind play with his problems, building up fantastic air castles, in hope of striking an idea that might be really illuminative.

He was strongly tempted to get up and scrape over the house again, but, he argued, he would probably find nothing, and would only prevent the resting of his tired nerves.

But he vowed a mighty vow, that he would put all his best energies and all his most tireless and indefatigable efforts into this thing, and improve this chance that had come to him to make good.

Locke's very convenient radium clock showed Hutchins four-thirty the last time he looked at it, and after that he fell into a deep and exhausted slumber. The two guards, one in the studio and one in the lower hall, dozed a little, too, though they didn't really sleep.

But at six o'clock, Hutchins' eyes flew open wide, and he pulled his wits together in an effort to decide whether he had heard something or had dreamed it.

Another instant, and he sensed a movement of some sort that suggested the near-by presence of a human being.

It was scarcely a sound—more like a stealthy moving thing that was perceptible through feeling rather than the ear.

Silently Hutchins sat up in bed. He was wide awake, every sense alert, and ready to spring when he deemed best.

He hadn't the slightest doubt that it was Locke, returning on some necessary errand, and hoping to find his room unoccupied.

Then the movement came again, it became almost a sound, and in the faint glimmer of dawn, Hutchins saw a figure coming slowly, silently but steadily toward him as he lay in bed.

He waited, eyes almost closed, until the person was within arm's reach and then jumped up and grabbed him.

A fearful shriek was the result, and in an instant Hutchins had snapped on the light and discovered that he was holding the squirming, fighting, struggling form of the Chinese boy, Charley.

"You!" he exclaimed in a sudden burst of absurd disappointment that it was not Locke.

At that moment the two guards came running, attracted by the noise.

"Here's the Chink," Hutchins said; "take care of him, you two, till I can get dressed. Don't hurt him."

Mindful of a hard day before him, Hutchins indulged in a refreshing bath and was pleased with the quality of the absent Locke's soap and towels.

He was half regretful after he had done this, for, he ruminated, "maybe I spoiled some perfectly good evidence by messing up this bathroom. Can't help it now, though, and anyway, the Charley thing is here to clean up after me. Incidentally, perhaps he can rustle some breakfast for me! It's an ill wind, etc., or do I mean, God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb?"

He found that the two guards had cannily placated Charley, and had already set him to work in the kitchen, under threat of instant arrest if he disobeyed a single order.

But obeying orders was Charley's middle name, and he broke eggs and brewed coffee skillfully and not uncheerfully.

"Well, youngest scion of the Ming Dynasty, you arrived on time, didn't you?"

"Yes, always at six."

The Chinaman who talked pidgin or not as he chose looked at him calmly. He was intelligent and respectful, but Hutchins had planned his own line of talk.

"What time did you go away last night?" he said, in a matter-of-fact way, as if a true answer were inevitable.

"When the pollismans come."

His air was as matter of fact as Hutchins' own, and the detective believed him—so far.

"Why?"

"No like. Aflaid."

"So you ran away."

"Yes, I go home. Every night I go home."

"But you usually stay until Mr. Locke is ready to retire—or at least until he dismisses you?"

"Yes—usually."

"What time did Mr. Locke leave last night?"

"Maybe half-past ten—maybe."

"You saw him go? Ah, you let him out?"

"I saw him go—I no let him out."

"Oh, yes, I remember—he let himself out, of course. Was that it?"

But the Chinaman had sensed something wrong, and became secretive.

"I no know—I no see him."

"Hey there—none o' that! You said you did see him! You want to be arrested? Shut up in big prison? Bread and water? Hey? You tell the truth, now. What time did you see Mr. Locke go out of this house?"

"Can't tell"—and Charley looked sullen. "Don't know."

"Well, you find out. Cudgel your memory now. Wasn't it earlier than half past ten?"

"No"; with an ugly glance.

"All right, was it later?"

"No," angrily now.

"Then, as near as you can fix the time, Mr. Locke left this house at about ten thirty. Alone?"

"I don't know."

"You do know! Alone?"

"Yes."

"Did he wear his—his big monk dress?"

"I don't know."

"Then you go to prison. Take him," Hutchins nodded to the guards.

"Wait—wait, I tell. No, he wear regla clo'es. Even coat."

"Ah, his evening clothes. That's better. What did he do with the monk dress?"

"We found that, Mr. Hutchins," one of the officers said; "it was in that junk cupboard where the painting things are."

"Did you put it there, Charley? Did you put it there for Mr. Locke, so he could go away just in his evening clothes? That was nice of you. He told you to, didn't he?"

But the Chinaman had returned to his overdone cooking, and Hutchins let up on him for the moment.

"That's it," he said, exultantly. "Locke vamoosed, tossed his monk's robe to the boy, and went out into the night. Took his hat from the hatstand as he passed out—or somebody's hat. Connivance, you see. Now this boy merely ran away from the police because the police scared him. I'll bet he knows nothing of what took place—and then this morning he returned at six o'clock from force of habit.

"He crept softly into Locke's room to see if he were there, not wanting to wake him. It's all fine. But look out that he doesn't get away. They're a sly race. We'll accumulate his fine-smelling breakfast, and then we'll see what to do with him."

Hutchins was in fine spirits, and asked to see the monk's robe.

He gazed carefully at the long plain garment, with its attached hood, deep and peaked.

"Put it away," he said, to the man, "but, stay, wait a minute, what's that smear?"

The garment itself was dull brown, but on the front

breast was an almost invisible spot that might or might not be blood.

"Hard to tell," he concluded, after a close examination, "but put it away very carefully. You fellows will have this place in your keeping right along, I suppose. Well, don't let any one touch that robe till it's tested."

Charley appeared at the table suddenly.

"Caterman here."

"Caterman? Oh, the caterer's man. Tell him to come in. And bring me another cup of coffee. It's the best in the world!"

The Chinaman smiled. Apparently conditions were not troubling him much.

The man from the caterer's came in diffidently.

"I suppose you want to take away your chairs and dishes," said Hutchins, casually. "You may do so—but be careful to take nothing but what is yours, and if you notice anything unusual or peculiar, report it. See?"

The man who, was intelligent, seemed to understand.

"By the way," Hutchins said, "did any of your people see Mr. Locke the master of the house—er—late last evening?"

"One of our men was on the door, sir."

"He was! Did he see Mr. Locke go out, by any chance?"

"He let him out."

"Ah. You interest me strangely! What time was this?"

"About half past ten."

"And why is your doorman so accurate as to the time?"

"Because," the man looked serious, "because it was right after that that we heard the commotion upstairs."

"Who do you mean by 'we'?"

"The waiters—and our people from Mascarelli's. We were in the dining room and pantry, of course."

"Of course. And you have been talking the affair over among yourselves?"

"Sure—why not?"

"No reason in the world. I meant, do you know all about the doorman letting Mr. Locke out? And what do you mean by letting him out? Couldn't he get out himself?"

"We had a regular man on the door to open it for the guests entering or leaving. So when Mr. Locke wanted to leave, of course Joe opened the door for him."

"And did he say anything—anything special?"

"He only said, 'I'll be back in a few moments.' That's all."

"You're sure of all this? You heard Joe tell it? If you're sure—I don't need Joe's story—but perhaps I'd better get it anyway."

"No need, sir. We all talked it over and over. Joe told his yarn a dozen times, and every time he said that Mr. Locke just went out—not hurried like, but as if ordinary—and he said—'Back in a few minutes.' That's all."

"And it's a lot. And whatever time it was by the clock, Joe says it was shortly before the excitement began?"

"Yes, sir, he says just that."

CHAPTER VI

PEARL JANE

Not quite content with a second-hand yarn, Hutchins walked around by the caterer's place on his way to Miss Vallon's home.

He found Joe, the doorman, and asked him concerning the matter.

Joe told the tale just as the other man had repeated it.

"Did Mr. Locke seem at all flustered or flurried, Joe?"

"Not at all, sir. Might have been just going of an errand—as I thought he was. Maybe that's what he did do, and met with some accident or foul play himself."

"Maybe. You noticed nothing more of special interest—in the light of later affairs?"

"No, sir—that is, except this. Right after Mr. Locke went away—well—maybe five minutes after, a lady came running downstairs. She had on one of those fancy dresses, and a dark cloak over it.

"‘Let me out, please,’ she says—pretty like. ‘I’m late to keep an appointment.’ ”

"What did she look like?"

"Lord, sir, I couldn't tell you. Those dressy ladies look all alike to me. Well, I let her out—I thought as she didn't have an escort, she'd have a car. But, no, she walked—not fast, but brisk like, and went over east. I watched her till I couldn't see her any more. Probably her appointment was near by."

"Probably. Then she didn't go the way Mr. Locke went?"

"Oh, no, sir, just the opposite way. He went toward the Avenue."

"I see. Well, very likely the lady is in no way concerned in last night's work."

"That's what I think, sir. Just a casual guest—going on to another party. That's the way they do."

"Who engaged you people, Joe? Mr. Locke?"

"No, sir. Mr. Post. He always does. Mr. Locke don't have parties very often, leastways, not big ones—and when he does, Mr. Post and Miss Vallon, they do all the ordering. Mr. Locke, he likes it better that way. He's no head for such details."

"Do you know him?"

"Not so well, sir, but I've seen him. A pleasant-speaking man to-day, and to-morrow—well, sort of absent-minded."

"He wasn't absent-minded when he left the house last night?"

"Not a bit. Bright as could be. Just, back in a minute, and a pleasant smile, and he was off."

"Do you suppose, Joe, that he could have—er—you know, committed a crime, and then gone off gay—like that?"

"Well, he wasn't to say gay, sir. But—oh, well there's no tellin' with these artist folks. They're not like real people. I know. I've opened doors to both sorts—to all sorts—and the people down here—they're sort of touch and go, here to-day and gone to-morrow. I can't seem to think that Mr. Locke would do such a thing—and I don't think he did—but if he did—why, yes, I think he'd be quite up to skipping off like as if nothing was the matter. And isn't the fact that he hasn't come back, pretty good proof of his guilt?"

"So you suspect him, do you?"

"It isn't for me to suspect, sir. But if he turns out to be the one, I shan't be overly surprised."

"You've no real reason to think him a criminal?"

"Oh, Lord, no, sir, not that. But when a man goes off and doesn't come back, and in a few minutes a lady's found dead, and nobody else on the premises so much as knows who she is—what else is there to think?"

"What, indeed?" said Hutchins. "Now, just one more question, my good man. That lady that went away soon after Mr. Locke, did more follow her?"

"Not till after the alarm was given. Not till folks wanted to get away from a house that had trouble coming to it."

"But you said the alarm was given almost immediately after Mr. Locke went."

"Yes—that's so. Well, I may as well own up I can't remember exactly. The lady I spoke of went alone; then when the others went, they went more by twos and threes. And they went talking excited like in whispers, and seemin' awful shocked, which wasn't surprisin'. But the first lady, now, she couldn't have known about it, for she was smiling and sweet."

"Did she have on a mask?"

"No, she'd taken that off."

"And you can't remember her dress at all?"

"Well—it was white. What I could see of it. But all the ladies wore long, full cloaks or capes that covered up their rig. Specially those who walked."

"A good many did walk?"

"Oh, yes. You see the Square people are neighborly, and most of 'em live only a few blocks off."

Concluding he could learn no more from this man,

Hutchins went to the task he dreaded, that of interviewing Miss Cutler.

He well knew Miss Vallon intended to shield the girl all she could from the least or slightest inconvenience.

And sure enough, when he arrived, Miss Vallon met him in the living room, which was the studio of her tiny apartment, with the word that Miss Cutler was not yet awake.

"And she is so worn out, I want her to sleep," Kate purred on, pleasantly, "won't I do? I can tell you all she could."

Hutchins came to the conclusion that directness was best with this type of woman—so he said:

"Miss Vallon, you will do up to a certain pitch—and maybe past it. But if I find it necessary to question Miss Cutler personally let me assure you it will be far better for her to consent to see me than to continue to refuse."

Kate Vallon paled a little, but she only said:

"Very well, question me."

"I come to you, because I understand you and Miss Cutler and Mr. Post are Mr. Locke's nearest friends, in this district, at least. I am told by the caterer's people that you ordered the supper, and such things as that betoken intimacy. Now, Miss Vallon, do you know where Mr. Locke is?"

"I have not the faintest idea."

Hutchins said nothing to that, but his thought was, "And you wouldn't tell me if you had!"

"Do you think Miss Cutler or Mr. Post knows?"

"I am sure Miss Cutler does not, and I am sure Mr. Post did not when I last saw him, which was when he brought us home last night."

"Does Mr. Post propose to try to find out?"

"That I don't know. You would better ask him."

"I intend to. Now, Miss Vallon, first of all, why are you

in this distinctly antagonistic frame of mind? Don't you know that you act as if you had something to conceal—or if there were something to be concealed, regarding Mr. Locke? Why is that?"

"You're utterly absurd. As a matter of fact, I know very little about Mr. Locke. We are all good friends, but ours is not an intimate sort of a crowd. I know no more about his private or personal affairs than he knows about mine. I have no idea whether his disappearance is a purely casual one, or whether it is in any way connected with the distressing affair of last night. Indeed, Mr. Hutchins, I have no information that would be of the slightest use to you."

Hutchins bowed slightly.

"Then I must ask for an interview with Miss Cutler. I am sorry to awaken her, but the law's demands are inexorable. And she can go to sleep again. The lassitude of the day after a party is not a real malady. If you refuse further, you will make me think there is some other reason——"

"Very well," and Kate Vallon went to fetch Pearl Jane.

The suspiciously quick return of the pair made Hutchins smile inwardly at the story of the sleeping girl, but he made no allusion to that.

"I don't want to worry or annoy you, Miss Cutler," Hutchins said with almost kindness, for he saw at once she had doubtless passed a sleepless night. "But if you will tell me your own story—tell me all that is on your mind—it will be so much easier for both of us, than if I have to drag it out piecemeal."

"I haven't any story—I haven't anything to tell," and the girl gave him a piteous look.

"Let me help you," and Hutchins was gentleness itself.

"When you hid in the closet what were you afraid of?"

"N-nothing in especial—but all the horrid things—the policeman, the dead woman——"

"Had you seen the dead woman?" Hutchins shot this out, suddenly, and Pearl Jane gave a little scream.

"No, oh, no, I hadn't seen her."

"Yes, you had seen her. You had leaned down and looked at her—and, in doing so you touched her—and you made a stain of blood on the sleeve of your Dutch costume."

To his surprise she suddenly changed her whole attitude. She sat up straight and seemed possessed of a new spirit of bravado.

"I didn't do any such thing!" she said, and Kate chimed in with, "Of course she didn't."

"May I see the frock?" Hutchins asked, calmly.

"Certainly," said Kate, and she left the room.

Hutchins took quick advantage.

"Miss Cutler," he said, softly, "trust in me. Truly, it is the best and wisest course. I will help you all I can—and I'm sure you have nothing of any moment to confess."

"Oh, I have! I have!" she moaned, and then Kate returned, and defiantly handed the pretty little costume to the detective.

Remembering just where he had seen the stain on the sleeve, he turned to it, but there was none there.

"You see!" cried Kate in triumph.

"Yes, I see," he returned, "and so can you, the place where it has been washed out. You can see clearly the mark made by the water or whatever was used to cleanse it."

"Nonsense," said Kate, airily, "that's where Miss Cutler chanced to stain her dress while eating a little supper

after we came home. I persuaded her to try to nibble a bit of toast and drink some chocolate, and the chocolate spattered as I poured it from the pot."

Hutchins looked at her in undisguised admiration.

"On the spur of the moment?" he asked, frankly, "or had you thought it up before?"

"The simple truth," persisted Kate, but he saw her eyelids quiver, and he knew it was far from the simple truth.

He didn't know exactly what to do. He suddenly remembered that the monk's robe had been found in that same closet, and that the girl might have smeared her sleeve from that. For he felt sure the dark stain on Locke's robe *was* blood. Did Pearl Jane know that?

But if Detective Hutchins' thoughts were chaotic, and his conclusions contradictory, they were no more so than the conflicting theories that filled the troubled brain of Andrew Barham.

From the moment he stepped in his wife's car to go back to his own home until he reached it, he was anxious and alarmed as to what the effect of the terrible news would be on Madeleine's mother.

He had a strange feeling that she would think he was somehow to blame—that he had let this terrible thing come to them. Yet surely he had kept watch and guard over his wife as fully and carefully as she would let him.

His heart was full of grief, and the very fact that he and Madeleine had not been so congenial or happy as some married pairs, served to accentuate rather than mitigate his sorrow. For he had really loved his wife—loved her far more than she ever knew or appreciated. More than she cared, probably. Yet when such a thought came to him he put it away, it seemed a sort of disloyalty.

But, he thought, as he neared home, the first thing to

do was tell Mrs. Selden. He was tempted to wait until morning, even strove to persuade himself that it would be better for her to have her night's sleep in peace, but he soon realized this idea was born of his distaste for the ordeal he knew he must face.

So he dismissed the chauffeur, let himself in the house and went upstairs.

He went to Madeleine's boudoir, and tapped softly, for he knew Claudine would be there awaiting her mistress.

The maid opened the door, and stared when she saw who was there.

"I will come in for a moment, Claudine," he said; "I have something to tell you. But first, what did your mistress wear this evening?"

"Madame went to a *Bal Masque*," came the reply. "She wore a beautiful costume of an Oriental Princess."

"Where was the ball to be?"

"Madame did not say."

"Did she say what time she would return?"

"Only to say that she would be late, but I must sit up for her. It is not yet late."

"No; but—Claudine, your mistress will never return—she—she is dead."

"Monsieur! Sir! What can you mean?"

"What I say. Have a care, Claudine, do not break into noisy weeping. I have all I can bear. Listen. My wife is dead—more, we have reason to think she was killed——"

"*Mon Dieu!* Murder!" and the girl trembled pitifully.

"Hush!" said Barham, knowing he must be stern, even cruel, if she was to be of use to him. "Now, listen—it is not for you to take the center of the stage. I have to tell Madame Selden—think what that will mean. Go at once, Claudine, awaken her, and ask her to receive me.

Do not tell her what I have told you—merely say I must see her at once. If she makes real objection, say it is on a gravely serious matter and is imperative.”

And then Andrew Barham paced Madeleine’s boudoir, until Claudine returned to tell him Mrs. Selden was ready to see him.

He found her sitting up in a chair, robed in *peignoir* and cap.

“What is it, Drew?” she asked. “Has anything happened? I’m sure you wouldn’t rout me out of bed otherwise.”

“Yes, Mother,” and Andrew Barham felt nearer her now than he ever had before. “Yes, something has happened—and we must bear it together, you and I. Something has happened to Madeleine—our little Maddy.”

“What is it? Tell me!”

She must have sensed it in part from his face, for her own countenance turned ashen, and she shook like a leaf.

“She was hurt—” he began—“badly hurt—and——”

“And she is dead!” the mother said; “you needn’t say it, I know. How was she hurt?”

Relieved at her calmness, Barham began very gently to tell her the details, when, suddenly gleaning the whole truth, she gave a scream and flinging out her arms, slipped down in her chair, unconscious.

Hastily summoning Claudine, Barham lifted her back to her bed, and by the use of violet salts she soon recovered her wavering consciousness.

And then she became violently vituperative.

“My child!” she moaned, “my baby—my little Madeleine!” Then, with a wild shriek, “Don’t you sit there, sobbing. You never loved her! You never understood her! Leave me, Drew—I can’t bear to look at you

now. No, come back here—tell me more—tell me all about my child—my baby. Where is she, where is she, I say! Where is she now?”

And he told her what he had done.

“Sent her off alone—to a terrible place! I said you never loved her! I knew you hated her——”

“Listen, mother—don’t misjudge me. It was necessary—the authorities wouldn’t let me bring her home——”

Mrs. Selden sat straight up in bed. Still handsome, she looked like some avenging goddess. Her white hair had become disordered, her dark eyes shone like coals of fire, and her sharp features seemed sharper still in her wild frenzy.

“The authorities! What have they to say about my child?”

In vain Barham tried to make her understand. He felt it would be best to get the whole scene over at once—and perhaps firmness was the wisest course.

Claudine stood by, now adjusting a pillow, now offering the salts bottle, and now breaking down herself.

“Try to understand, Mother,” Barham said, gently, but holding her by both hands and gazing into her eyes. “Madeleine has been killed—murdered. We have to do many things in that case, that we would not in case of an ordinary death. We have——”

“Where was she?” she said. “Where did this happen? At Emmy Gardner’s?”

“No; Mother, have you any idea where Madeleine started out for to-night?”

“No; but she said she was going somewhere else before she went to Emmy Gardner’s.”

“Yes, she did. She went to a house in Washington Square.”

“Washington Square! Who in the world lives there?”

"A Mr. Locke. Did she ever speak to you of him?" In spite of himself the man's voice trembled.

"No, never. Rosamond Sayre was here this evening—just after dinner." Mrs. Selden said.

"Madame Sayre said she would meet Madame at Madame Gardner's at eleven," Claudine volunteered.

"And what time did she leave home?" Barham asked.

"About nine-thirty," the maid answered.

The reports all tallied as to time. There could be no doubt that Madeleine had gone to Locke's from her own home and of her own accord. But why?—*why?*

"Who is Mr. Locke?" Mrs. Selden said, quietly enough now.

"He's an artist. I wish, Mother, you'd try to sleep now—may Claudine perhaps give you a little chloral? You know you must be brave to-morrow—we have hard times before us—you and I."

The man felt so drawn to her through their common tragedy that he showed an affection he had rarely if ever shown before.

But it had small effect on the half-crazed woman.

"You and I!" she cried, with a burst of hysterical laughter. "You pretend to weep for Madeleine—my beautiful Madeleine! You! You ruined her whole life!"

"How?" cried the man, stung by this injustice.

"Because you wouldn't give her money! You, rolling in wealth, denied that precious baby a few paltry hundreds——"

"I never did, Mother. Madeleine never asked me for a dollar and was refused."

"She didn't dare ask! She was afraid of you! You cowed her spirit—her beautiful spirit——"

"What did Maddy want money for—more than I al-

lowed her?" he asked, a strange wonder clutching at his heart.

"For her Bridge games—her only pleasure. She had bad luck, poor child—she lost—oh, she lost thousands—"

"Mother! What are you saying? Madeleine lost thousands at Bridge!"

"Yes—time and again. I gave her all I had——"

"There, there, dear, don't let's talk about this now. Let us both try to get some rest."

"No! I don't want to rest! I want to talk! Tell me more—tell me all—everything—just as if I had been there. What was this place? Was it a right place?"

"Oh, yes, I'm sure they were all charming people——"

The man was nearly beside himself, and said what he thought most likely to soothe her.

"Was it a musicale?"

"No——"

But his very voice failed him, and Claudine took up the burden. "It was a *Bal Masque*, Madame Selden. And Madame, she looked so ravishing in a costume of silks and sequins and jewels——"

Mrs. Selden again sat bolt upright and pointed her finger at Barham.

"And you sent her—my child—to the—oh, to the terrible funeral place, in that gewgaw costume!"

It was the first time Barham had realized this. It was terrible! Madeleine in her casket, in that gaudy robe! But he had been so engrossed in other and to him graver matters, he hadn't even thought of that.

"How horrible!" Mrs. Selden broke out again. "How ghastly! You care nothing for my sensibilities. Go—go at once, and take proper clothing."

"I will, mother," the distressed man said, humbly. "What shall it be? A little white gown?"

"Yes—" and then Mrs. Selden broke down and sobbed.

Yet in a moment another outbreak seemed imminent, and Barham feeling he could stand no more, and thinking he had done his duty, rose and left the room.

"Do all you can for her, Claudine," he said, "and if she gets violent, call up the doctor. I can do no more. But I will get a gown and send down for Mrs. Barham. No, don't come, I'll find it. Stay with Madame Selden."

And at last Andrew Barham closed the door upon the haven of his own room, alone.

CHAPTER VII

A FRIEND INDEED

ANDREW BARHAM sat at his breakfast table.

After several hours of thinking, wondering, planning and sorrowing, he had been blessed with a short respite of fitful slumber, and now, though still in a state of mental chaos, he was outwardly composed.

He was relieved that Mother Selden had not joined him in the breakfast room, though she had sent him some messages. It was her custom to breakfast in bed, but he feared she would change her plan for to-day, and when she did not, he was glad. One of his problems was what to do about her continued presence under his roof.

He could not summarily dismiss Madeleine's mother, as one would a servant, yet he couldn't face years of solitude *à deux* with the unamiable lady. However, that was a future consideration—there were many more pressing.

"Hello, Drew—here I am—I just had to come! May I?"

Nick Nelson came into the room, pushing past the waitress, and grasping Barham's hand.

Words of sympathy were unnecessary between these two friends, and Barham accepted the unspoken message he read in Nelson's eyes.

"All in the papers?" Barham asked. "I haven't seen them."

"Yes; but I suppose garbled versions. Now, Drew, I'm here to help. Command me in any way you like. My time is all yours—and I needn't tell you everything else I own is."

Nelson was a big, hearty, cheery sort, usually smiling, and the mere sight of his grave, solemn face, gave Barham a curious feeling as of looking at a stranger.

"I don't know, yet, what you can do, Nick, but I know there's a lot to be done. Have a cup of coffee, and let's talk things over."

Nelson, who was sharp-eyed, was pleased at this attitude. He had feared a more sensitive reserve, a hesitancy on Barham's part to be receptive or responsive.

"First," said Nelson, "who is this Locke?"

"He seems to be an artist, with a decent studio and a seemingly proper coterie of friends. That's all I can tell you of him. The first thing, in my mind, is to find out how Madeleine came to know him—why she ever went there."

"Madeleine went her own gait—" Nelson began.

"I know it. But, Nick, I always knew where she was. I didn't cotton to her card-playing cronies—but they were all right. You know, the Gardners, the Sayres, the Thornleys—all that bunch are, at least, of our own people—not Bohemians."

"Is this Washington Square place a Bohemian joint?"

"No, it isn't; as I saw it. I mean it isn't the Greenwich Village crowd. Though I met only one or two, beside the police people. But I gathered from the general atmosphere that it was the place of a working artist rather than a *poseur*. Still, I may be mistaken—and anyway, it doesn't matter. Any studio on Washington Square seems to me a strange place to find my wife."

"Did it occur to you, Drew, that she may have been—may have died somewhere else, and been taken there?"

"Don't mince words, Nelson. Madeleine was murdered—the fact is terrible enough—why balk at the word. No, your suggestion isn't tenable. She was seen there for

some time before she was killed. I've tried and tried to think it was an accident—but it wasn't. The doctors agree on that and, too, I can see that it couldn't have been."

Barham sat back in his chair and pushed away from the table.

His hair gleamed golden in the morning sunlight, his heavy eyebrows of the same color, seemed to contract into a straight line as he gazed intently at Nelson.

"Nick, they say that Locke man killed her. I'm not so sure that he did. But I want to find the murderer—that's one thing I'm sure of. Will you help me do that?"

"Rather! But I'm no good as a sleuth. I'm willing enough—and I'm shrewd, in a way—but I've none of that detective instinct in my make-up. Now, I've heard of a man——"

"No, don't drag in a private detective. They're no good—and too, the police detective on this case seems to be a clever sort. Give him his chance. But I want to find out some things—about—Madeleine. That's an admission, isn't it, for a man to make, concerning his own wife! But I did a lot of thinking last night—and, well, maybe, I didn't treat the girl right—after all."

"Hush that, Drew! Since you've raised the question, let me say once for all, you've nothing to reproach yourself for. Maddy was beautiful, she was accomplished, and all that—but she—she wasn't right! You did everything, and more, that mortal man could do—but the woman was—she was wrong."

"Explain yourself, please," and Andrew Barham's blue-gray eyes took on that deeper blue that came to them in moments of extreme anger or other strong passion.

"Drop that attitude, Drew," the other said, quietly. "I'll tell you if you want me to—or, I'll not tell you. But

there are things about Madeleine that you have never known."

Barham's attitude changed to one of wonder.

"Tell me, Nick," he said, briefly.

"Not here—come to some quieter place."

But before the two men could have further talk, Detective Hutchins was announced.

"Sorry to intrude," he said, politely, "but there are some questions I have to settle at once, Mr. Barham."

"Very well, come into the library," and Andrew Barham introduced Nelson, and the three sat down.

"To be through with this interview as quickly as possible, Mr. Barham," Hutchins said, "I'll tell you where we stand. We, the police, have practically only two facts to work on—Mrs. Barham's death, and the disappearance of Mr. Locke. Anything else we know is part and parcel of one of these two propositions. Now, it is self-evident that you cannot tell us anything about the whereabouts of Mr. Locke. But I am obliged to ask you some questions regarding your wife's life. I am sorry——"

"Mr. Hutchins," Andrew Barham said, quietly, "I will ask you to eliminate the personal equation entirely. I know it is from consideration of my feelings that you hesitate or apologize at introducing these subjects, but I assure you it will make it easier for me if you will say what is necessary, in a business-like way. I am quite ready to tell you what I can, but let us be brief and to the point."

Hutchins' respect and admiration for this man rose another point, and he said, simply, "I understand, Mr. Barham. Now, shall I speak before Mr. Nelson?"

"Certainly. I have no secrets regarding these things from him."

"Then can you tell me who invited Mrs. Barham to Mr. Locke's studio party?"

"That I cannot. I should be glad to learn, myself. I had no idea she knew him, or knew any people who would be likely to attend the affair."

"Yet she was there."

"Not only that, Mr. Hutchins, but she went there voluntarily and from her own home. Her own maid dressed her in the Oriental costume, and her own chauffeur drove her there at her directions. All of this is as much a mystery to me as to you. Clear it up if you can."

Though Barham's voice was steady and his manner calm, Nelson noted the occasional clenching of his hands or biting of his lip, as if he held himself under control with difficulty.

"You've asked Mrs. Selden about it?" asked Nelson.

"That reminds me," Hutchins put in, "I must ask to see Mrs. Selden. Shall I interview her later, or will you send for her now?"

Barham considered.

"As you like," he said, "but Mrs. Selden is exceedingly nervous—even hysterical. Can you not excuse her?"

"No; it is imperative. And, it will save time," he glanced at the library clock, "if she will come here now."

"Get her, will you, Nick?" Barham said, and Nelson left the room.

"Be careful with her," Barham warned Hutchins. "She may be cool and collected, and yet, ready to fly into a passion at some simple remark."

"I'll manage her," said the detective carelessly and confidently; yet when, a moment later, Marcia Selden appeared, he lost a little of his cocksure confidence in himself.

She came into the room, tall, stately, gowned in the deepest black, and her face was like a thundercloud. She

walked slowly across the room, unheeding the men as they rose, and seated herself in an armchair.

Hutchins said afterward, all he could think of was a Scripture verse that was something like, "Terrible as an army with banners!"

Nelson followed her in, and Claudine remained, uncertainly, on the threshold.

"Wait outside, Claudine," Mrs. Selden said, "and close the door."

"Now, sir," she turned to Hutchins, unheeding Barham's word of introduction, "who killed my daughter?"

But her speech didn't frighten the detective as had the majesty of her appearance. Indeed, to him, that question placed her at once, as a mere foolish woman, and as such he answered her.

"We don't know yet, Mrs. Selden, we are endeavoring to find out."

"When will you know?"

"That I can't say, but I am hoping that you can give us some help in our efforts to find the criminal."

"You know the criminal! You know it was that artist person."

"Have you any reason to think that, aside from the fact that her death occurred there?"

"Yes, the fact of his disappearance. Why else would he run away?"

"That is only negative evidence. However, it will be sifted. Now, Mrs. Selden, can you not tell me of any friend of your daughter's who might invite her to that party? Mr. Barham is quite sure that her intimates are not to be found in that section of the city."

"Indeed they are not! My daughter never went down there of her own accord——"

"But she ordered her driver herself——"

"I know all that—but she was forced into it. Some one *made* her do it!"

"Oh, come now, mother," Barham said, looking at her curiously, "how could that be? Who could so coerce Madeleine?"

"Call in that maid," said Hutchins, who was getting a little excited.

"Claudine," he said to her, quickly, "when you dressed Mrs. Barham for the masquerade, did she seem glad to be going or did she seem to be going unwillingly?"

Claudine hesitated and looked from one to another.

"Tell the truth," said Barham, quietly, but Nelson saw him turn a shade paler as if he feared a revelation.

"Then," the maid said, hesitatingly, "I can scarcely express it—yet it was this way; as if Madame wanted to go—yet feared it."

"Feared it!" exclaimed Barham.

"Perhaps not that—" Claudine was really trying to give just the meaning she had in mind, "it was more as if Madame were about to make an experiment."

"To go to such a place for the first time?" suggested Nelson.

"Yes, that is it. And she wanted to look her very best—and, still—she hesitated. Once or—yes, twice—she pushed me away, and said—'I won't go! Get me another gown.' Then in an instant she said, 'I will go! I must go!' and she went through with it. When all arrayed, she looked so beautiful she was much pleased, and seemed eager then to go."

"Inexplicable," said Nelson, "but there was surely some influence at work, whether good or bad."

"Of course there was!" Mrs. Selden cried hysterically. "And I have an idea that I know who is back of all this."

"You do, Mrs. Selden?" Hutchins was really startled. "Then you must tell at once."

"I will," and her voice grew louder. "There he sits! Andrew Barham! He never understood my poor daughter."

"Hush, hush," Nelson began, but Barham said, "Let her alone, Nick, it's bound to come."

"Yes," the irate woman continued, "I don't know how he worked it, but he had her decoyed down there and lured away to her death—my Madeleine, my baby!"

"You must interpret this outbreak as you see fit, Mr. Hutchins," Barham said, with a weary dignity. "I assure you it is merely the vagary of a brain almost disordered by the shock and grief of the tragedy. Knowing Mrs. Selden as I do, it doesn't entirely surprise me, but I will state that it is utterly untrue. I have no idea why my wife went to Mr. Locke's last night. That is my statement."

Few could look at the distressed but fearless face, few could note the straightforward, even defiant manner and not be convinced the man spoke the truth.

But Hutchins was a wary sort, and he was quick to follow up any new line.

He nodded sidewise to Barham, but addressed himself to Mrs. Selden, thinking, and rightly, that any moment might bring an outburst of hysterics and he could learn no more.

"Why would Mr. Barham do this, Mrs. Selden?" Hutchins asked, making his voice as matter-of-fact as he could.

"Maddy was a gambler," Mrs. Selden said, looking at him out of eyes that now stared piercingly, and again glared wildly about the room, "a terrible gambler. Poor baby, it was the only happiness she had. Her husband neglected her——"

"I protest!" Nelson cried. "That is not true! The reverse is the truth——"

"Be still, Nick," Barham was very white and quiet, "let her tell what she will."

Something in his calm voice quelled Mrs. Selden and she suddenly became like a whimpering child. "Well, anyway," she said, "they didn't get on. He was good to her—yes, I must admit that—but—oh, well, she did waste a lot of money. Poor little Maddy, what gown did you pick out for her, Drew? That white China crêpe?"

"Yes, mother," and Barham spoke as gently as if she had not arraigned him so cruelly.

"And we must have flowers—lots of valley lilies—and white lilac—Maddy loved white lilac——"

"Yes, Mother, that will all be attended to."

"Attended to! How thoughtless you are of my wishes, Andrew. I want to attend to it myself. No one but me shall pick out Maddy's flowers——"

"I know," Barham said, patiently, "but don't you remember, Mother, the florist is coming here to consult you——"

"When? When, Drew?"

"This afternoon, at three o'clock. You asked me to order him to do so, you sent me the message by Claudine this morning."

"So I did—when I first woke up. I dreamed about it. Well, Drew, dear, you're a good boy. Maybe you didn't kill Maddy—I mean, maybe——"

Gravely listening, and closely watching Mrs. Selden, Hutchins slowly drew his pencil through some lines he had written.

"I think her conversation cannot be reported, Mr. Barham," he said; "she is not responsible."

He had not meant this to be heard by the now silent woman.

But it was, and she turned on him in fury.

"Not responsible, young man! I! Marcia Selden! How dare you say such a thing! I'll have you arrested—get out of this house this instant! I am entirely responsible! I have more brains in a minute than you'll have in a thousand years! I know what I'm talking about. Indeed I do!"

"Oh, Mother," Barham's patience began to give way, "do stop this tirade. Please be more quiet."

Again her voice rose to a shriek.

"Brute! Unnatural man! My child is killed, and he says, 'Be quiet!' I won't be quiet! I will say what I think!"

"Then say it without me," and Barham rose and left the room.

"Follow him, Mr. Nelson," Hutchins said, quickly, "it may not be a bad plan."

Nelson went, and the detective tried to ingratiate himself with Marcia Selden.

Claudine sat beside her, trying to soothe her, but with small success.

"Now, dear lady," he said, "you tell me anything you can to help me, and then you go away and rest before the florist comes to see you. You've a lot to attend to, with him, you know. Were you in your daughter's confidence? Did she ever tell you about her acquaintance with Mr. Locke?"

For a long moment Marcia Selden looked at him.

Hutchins knew that his fate was in the balance. She might respond to his advances and give him her confidence and she might fly into a rage at him.

"No," she said, at last, "she never told me of any such

person. She never mentioned such a place as a studio on Washington Square. I don't believe she had ever been there before. And perhaps I was too hard on Mr. Barham. He was never unkind to his wife. They were probably as fond of each other as most married people."

Hutchins was amazed. Surely, this was the talk of a rational woman.

"Does Mr. Barham play cards?" he asked, trying to make the question sound casual, though it was of importance to him.

"Not much. He plays Bridge, but an indifferent game. My daughter was a brilliant player—a renowned player. But she had bad luck—always. And she lost."

"Large sums?"

"Oh, yes, enormous."

"And Mr. Barham objected?"

"He didn't know it. At least he didn't know how very large they were."

"How did she pay them?"

"I gave her money frequently—then, of course, sometimes she won—and sometimes, I think, she borrowed from her friends."

"And from me," Claudine said, unable to resist the temptation to speak. "Many times did I lend Madame the money for the gamble."

"Did she repay you?" asked Hutchins.

"Sometimes, not always."

"Some is still due you, then?"

"Yes, sir."

"Hush, Claudine, it will be paid, as you well know. How dare you say a word against that sainted child! My Madeleine! My baby!"

Hutchins had already had enough experience to know that this was the precursor to another tantrum, and he

fled the room, leaving the now screaming woman to the ministrations of the despairing maid.

"You see how matters stand, Mr. Hutchins," Barham said, as the detective found him and Nelson in an adjoining room. "Mrs. Selden is not demented, but she is irrational at times, mostly because of this shock—but also owing to her naturally excitable disposition and inflammable temper. You may make such use of her statements as you see fit, but in justice to myself, I must ask that you verify them by some more competent testator before you accept them as true."

"I have no intention of reporting anything Mrs. Selden said," the detective told him. "I am convinced for myself that she cannot control her speech when the frenzy comes upon her. Moreover, a few moments ago, after you left the room, she greatly modified her expressions of vituperation. Now, I am due at the inquiry to be held in Mr. Locke's place at eleven o'clock this morning. You need not come, Mr. Barham, but you should be represented."

"I will represent him," Nelson said, promptly. "I am a lawyer, and I will do all that is necessary. Also, I will be responsible for Mr. Barham in any and every way."

"Thank you, Nick—I'm glad to have you help me out like that. Mr. Hutchins, what is this Mr. Locke like? Do you know him?"

"No; nor can I seem to find any picture of him. But I'm told that he is of what is called the artist type—long hair, big glasses, low collar and flowing tie."

Nelson smiled at the graphic description. "I didn't know that sort grew nowadays," he said, "outside the cartoons."

"They do in Washington Square—lots of them."

"Do you gather that he is a—a gentleman?" Barham continued.

"I do gather that," Hutchins said, "and partly because I spent last night—what was left of it—in his room, and made use of his bed and bath. One can judge a man by such things, and I gathered that he was of decent, even refined habits—yet, of course, that does not preclude his being a criminal."

Hutchins spoke thoughtfully; and added, "Also, he has a jolly good sort of servant."

"What sort?" said Barham.

"A Chinese boy; devoted to his master, neat and efficient, and about as talkative as a steamed clam."

"Still, he ought to be made to tell you of Locke," Nelson said.

"Yes—but after all, it isn't so important to be told about Locke as to find him."

"Telling of him may lead to finding him."

"It may, but I don't think the Chinese can tell anything of importance. I'm quite sure he doesn't know where Locke is. But we'll find him yet. That I do feel sure of."

CHAPTER VIII

THE PUBLIC INQUIRY

WHEN Hutchins reached the Locke apartment the inquiry was already in progress. Doctor Babcock was conducting it, and though an able and shrewd questioner, he was glad of Hutchins's presence.

For Lieutenant Hutchins was looked upon as one of the most far-seeing and quick-witted of the Homicide Squad of the Detective Bureau, and Babcock wanted him to hear every word of the evidence.

Not that there was much evidence. It was a baffling case.

Thomas Locke seemed to have vanished off the face of the earth, and yet except for the fact of that vanishing there was no reason to connect him in any way with the murder of Madeleine Barham.

No proof; indeed, no suggestion of acquaintance between the two could be discovered.

The medical examiner well knew that it was not an unknown case for a wife to have friends of whom her husband knew nothing, but that fact couldn't prove anything in the present instance.

All the guests of the night before had been allowed to go to their homes because of the utter absence of any sort of evidence to warrant their detention or even further questioning, except for three friends, who were said to be Locke's intimates.

These three, Miss Vallon, Miss Cutler and Mr. Post, had been summoned to the inquiry, and Rodman Jarvis, of course, was there.

Nick Nelson, present in the interests of Barham, looked about curiously.

The pleasant, roomy studio, with its untheatrical furnishings, attracted him, and he marveled at the absence of the conventional claptrap. He sat next to Jarvis, and the two struck up a passing acquaintance.

Chinese Charley was interviewed first.

"He'll tell nothing, whether he can or not," Nelson said to his neighbor.

"If he knows anything, they'll get it out of him," Jarvis argued.

And they did. It wasn't very much, but by dint of threats and hints of punishment they succeeded in getting what seemed like a straight story from the Chinaman.

It was to the effect that Locke had, about half past ten, come down the front stairs, found Charley, and given him the monk's robe, with orders to hang it in the closet. Locke had then taken his hat and light topcoat and had walked out of the front door, as the caterer's doorman had told Hutchins.

But after that, Charley knew no more concerning the doings of his master. He, himself, had run away home at sight of the policeman, but next morning, from a sense of duty, or from force of habit, had turned up at his usual hour of six o'clock.

"Isn't that very early?" asked Babcock. "I thought artists were a late crowd."

"I have much to do," Charley returned, gravely. "I clean all—I sweep, dust—make all pleasant. Then the breakfast."

"I see. And was Mr. Locke always ready for his breakfast?"

"If here. Not always here."

"Ah, away part of the time?"

"Yes. Away part of the time."

"Where did he go?"

The Chinaman shrugged his shoulders, with a mere "No," but no words could have expressed a more utter absence of information on that subject.

A few further questions and he was set aside as a hopeless source of enlightenment.

Rodman Jarvis was called next, and he also knew but little. His acquaintance with Locke dated perhaps from six months back. He knew him in a social and casual way, but not at all intimately or confidentially. He himself was a lawyer, but he had artistic leanings and in his leisure hours preferred to consort with painters or art students rather than learned members of his own profession.

He said there were perhaps a dozen or so who met occasionally for a social evening or afternoon, but the occasions were not very frequent, and they rarely saw each other in the intervals.

His estimate of Locke was all to the good, though avowedly superficial. He said Locke was something of a dreamer, rather intellectual, a fair artist, and a good pal. He was more inclined to listen than to talk, Jarvis said, when the crowd held their pow-wows, but when he did speak, he usually said something worth listening to. Oh, not highbrow, or erudite, but original and interesting.

All of which put the absent Locke in a pleasant light, and gave no impression of a sinister character.

But Babcock sighed, as he realized that this, after all, meant very little. He asked Henry Post for further description of the missing man.

"Locke is a good sort," Post declared. "But I know little about him. He kept to himself—as we most of us do, down here. We are not inquisitive about our neighbors,

so it is only as a fellow artist that I can tell you much about him. He is a chap who enjoys himself wherever he is. Who is ready to take his part and do his share always. But I've never known him to talk about himself or to draw attention to himself—except as it might follow a discussion of his work. He is an earnest and a painstaking painter, though as yet he has not made a name for himself in the Art world. Perhaps once a week, a few of us congregate here and jabber on art topics. A party, such as was held last night, is most unusual for Locke to give though he often has smaller gatherings. He goes away a great deal—I don't know where, but I fancy off on sketching tours—or perhaps to visit friends. I have often telephoned him here and received no answer. But that is the way with most of us down here. We are a lawless lot, so far as the laws of convention are concerned."

"Then you know nothing, Mr. Post, concerning Mr. Locke's family, relatives or more intimate friends?"

"Nothing at all."

"And you have no idea where he is at this moment?"

"Not the slightest."

Both Jarvis and Nick Nelson watched Post carefully as he made this last statement, but neither could detect by so much as the quiver of an eyelash that the man was telling other than the exact truth. Indeed, his whole manner and attitude was frank and straightforward, and Nelson, who was a good reader of character, felt that Post knew no more of Locke than he had declared.

Miss Vallon was questioned next.

Her story was much the same as Henry Post's.

She gave the impression that she and Miss Cutler, Mr. Post and Mr. Locke formed a sort of informal quartette. That they dined together perhaps once a fortnight or so, and afterward spent the evening in Locke's studio, dis-

cussing the subjects in which they were all interested. Miss Vallon was already an illustrator of books or magazines. Miss Cutler was still studying—while the two men painted pictures without any definite idea of their ultimate bestowal.

“Did you never hear Mr. Locke mention a relative or a near friend outside your circle?” Babcock asked.

“No, not that I remember,” Miss Vallon replied, thoughtfully. “I may have heard him speak of his mother once or twice, but only in a reminiscent way; I don’t know whether she is living or not.”

So Miss Vallon’s knowledge was of no more help than Post’s.

The examiner turned hopefully to Pearl Jane Cutler.

That young woman had recovered her normal poise, and faced the listening group calmly, even coolly.

Hutchins watched her intently, for he had left her rather abruptly that morning earlier, finding his time was so short.

“Can you tell us, Miss Cutler, any more concerning the family or friends of Mr. Locke, than the other witnesses have?”

“No,” she said, quietly, shaking her bobbed hair and raising her wistful eyes to the face of the questioner.

Her intent regard disconcerted him a trifle, but he went on:

“You know him, casually, as Miss Vallon does?”

“Precisely in the same way,” she replied. “I have never seen Mr. Locke except in Miss Vallon’s company. We live in the same house.”

“Then I will ask you concerning another phase of the matter. Will you tell me of your finding Mrs. Barham’s body on the smoking-room floor?”

“Finding—What! I—I didn’t find——”

"Be careful, Miss Cutler—you will only make trouble for yourself by withholding the truth. You were seen—*seen*, bending down over the body of Mrs. Barham! Do you still deny it?"

Partly to intimidate his witness, and partly to hide his own disinclination to pursue this subject, Babcock frowned sternly and spoke with severity.

But to his surprise, Pearl Jane threw up her head defiantly, and said: "Who saw me?"

"I see no reason to refuse an answer to that question," Babcock returned; "it was the Chinaman, Charley."

"Where was he?" said Pearl Jane, speaking almost conversationally and looking sharply at the Chinese boy.

Hutchins regarded the girl with surprise. What had so changed her attitude? Also, what revelations were about to be made?

"Where were you, Charley?" and Babcock turned to the servant.

"Light behind Missee Cutler," he replied, stolidly staring straight ahead of him.

"And where was Miss Cutler?"

"In smokee loom—lookkee allee time at dead lady."

It was characteristic of the boy to use the broken English in time of embarrassment or emotion—and to use almost perfect English when calm and unperturbed.

"Was Miss Cutler alone in that room?"

"Gentleman at door. Lookkee out on studio."

"I will tell," said Pearl Jane, speaking clearly and steadily. "I was in the small hall back of the smoking room—where the back stairs come up."

"What were you doing there?"

"Only fixing my cap which had become disarranged—and assuring myself that my costume was all in order. There is a mirror there and a light."

"Go on."

"And I heard an exclamation or two in the den—that is, the smoking room. The door was almost closed. I pushed it open, and looked in. I saw some one on the floor. Impelled partly by curiosity, partly by a desire to be of assistance, I went to look—yes, I did bend over the body—I did, I dare say, get a smear of blood on my sleeve—" the girl shuddered, "but that's the whole truth. I ran away at once, when I saw what it was."

"Why did you run away?"

"Fright, horror, shock. I have never seen anything like that before and I scarcely knew what I was doing. I ran and hid in a closet—for no reason but that I was beside myself with fear and terror."

"Who was in the den?"

"I saw no one but some man, who was looking out of the door into the studio."

"You touched nothing in the room? Moved nothing?"

"N-no," but Pearl Jane dropped her eyes, and Hutchins thought he noted a little gasp of alarm. Yet, who could connect this child with crime? Moreover, her story tallied with Charley's. He said he saw her bend over the body. She admitted it. Henderson was in the room at that time—at the studio door calling for some one to find a doctor.

Doubtless the girl did exactly as she recounted, doubtless, too, the Chinaman's story was true and he did see her as he described.

There was, so far, not the slightest reason to suspect either of these two of any connection whatever with the crime itself.

To the question, "Who did it?" there could be no convincing answer until Thomas Locke could be found and made to speak for himself.

However, there was one point on which Hutchins felt he must have light.

"Miss Cutler," he said, easily, "are you and Mr. Locke especially good friends?"

The girl's cheeks took on a deeper color, but she said coldly, "Will you state what you mean by that term?"

"Whew!" Hutchins thought to himself. "What has come over her? She's been coached by somebody—and a mighty good job, at that."

Aloud, he said, "I will—since you ask it. I mean, is there any romantic attachment between you?"

"No," she replied, and her air was almost judicial; "no, not that. We are pals—good chums—fellow-workers—that is all."

Except for the sudden blush the question had called up, the girl seemed entirely unmoved.

But Hutchins said to himself, "She'll bear watching. She has turned from a hysterical baby to a self-composed young woman altogether too quickly! I believe she has had some word from Locke, somehow. Of course he will telephone to some one, as soon as he can manage it. Unless he is really the criminal and has vamoosed for good and all."

"Well," Nick Nelson said to his new friend, Jarvis, after hearing some more of this futile querying, "I don't see as anybody can get anywhere. It isn't the Examiner's fault—nor yet Hutchins'—but they have nothing to work on. So far as we can gather, Locke is a proper, well-behaved citizen—but he mayn't be at all. Now, he's got to be found! Hang it all, man, nobody can drop out of existence like that!"

"Oh, it isn't so difficult to hide," Jarvis reflected. "I know Tommy, and I like him—in this casual way we all know him—but if he is a deep-dyed villain, and he may

be for all I know, he could easily keep himself hidden—even if he stayed right here in New York. Why, if he were to cut his hair short and raise a mustache, say, and lose his big glasses—his own mother wouldn't know him. He is in no way a distinguished looking man—I mean, he isn't distinctive looking."

"Even as you and I," Nelson said smiling.

Jarvis looked at him.

"Either you or I would find it harder to disguise ourselves than Locke," he said; "we're of stronger peculiarities."

"But why do you think Locke is under necessity of such procedure?" Nelson asked; "do you assume that he is responsible for the crime?"

"I don't quite say that," Jarvis returned, slowly, "but I don't see any other way to look."

"What about that girl?" Nelson asked; "the little, pretty one?"

"Pearl Jane? Oh, she's an innocent baby. I know her. She did get into the room—and she doubtless felt curiosity—or maybe wanted to be helpful, thinking some one had fainted. She's all right—that child, but she *is* in love with Tommy."

"And he with her?"

"That I don't know. Maybe. But there's nothing positive about it. I'm romantic—and I've thought lately I sensed a dawning romance there; but maybe not—maybe not."

And now the authorities were looking over the trinkets found at or near the scene of the crime.

No one present claimed the glove or the fan or the mask or the vanity case—but the examiner was not surprised.

They were all of small value, and to claim them might

lay an innocent guest open to annoying questions that would mean nothing after all.

The only thing that the detective had any hope of using was the glove. He felt vaguely that much could be learned from a woman's glove, but though he had examined it carefully inside and out, he could read nothing from it. To him it was a glove—a long, white kid glove—that was all.

The beads, the spangles, too, all merely meant the presence of various guests who had worn them—they were in no way indicative.

Hairpins—what could be read from them?

Had any of the other women a chance to enter and lean over the body?

Not that Babcock knew of.

Then there was the foolish little tinsel dagger, there was a man's glove, several cigarette stubs—oh, pshaw, none of these things could mean anything. The thing to do was to find Thomas Locke, and it must be done.

Doctor Babcock voiced this as his ultimate conclusion. He declared that, in his opinion this consideration and discussion of hairpins and men's gloves got them nowhere. Now, he would only ask questions that definitely concerned the personality, the character, and the possible whereabouts of Locke himself. And he asked that if anybody knew anything—anything at all, bearing on those things, he would immediately disclose such knowledge.

There was a slight stir in the back part of the room, and a feminine voice said, "I may be able to tell something of interest."

The speaker was a quiet looking little woman, who gave her name as Eleanor Goodwin. She stated that she lived in the house next door, and that being often lonely, she frequently amused herself looking out of her windows at her neighbors.

"And you did this last evening?" Babcock asked hopefully.

"Yes—all during the arrival of the guests and off and on afterward."

"You saw anything of interest?"

"It all interested me," said Miss Goodwin, who seemed to be a pathetic creature, "because I have little excitement in my own life. I watched the guests arrive, because I caught many a glimpse of the beautiful or funny costumes, and it gave me a glimpse of gay life."

"And later," Babcock did not wish to hurry her unduly, but he did want to know if she had seen anything of any importance.

"Well, later, I should say about ten-thirty, I saw Mr. Locke come out and come down the steps."

"You know him?"

"By sight, oh, yes. I do not know him to speak to. Well, he went over west, toward Fifth Avenue, and he got on to a Fifth Avenue bus."

"You're sure of this?"

"Positive."

"Inside, or on top?"

"He went up on top. I saw him ascend the stairway as the bus moved on."

"Thank you, Miss Goodwin, this may be helpful. Now did you see anything after that?"

"Yes, very soon after I saw a lady come out and go away all alone. I thought it strange she had no escort and I watched her."

"Did she get on a bus?"

"No; she went in the other direction—over east. I lost sight of her at once."

"Can you describe her at all?"

"Only that she was not very tall—a little plump—no,

not that, but not so overly slender as some—and she had on a dark cape. However, it blew apart a little and I could almost discern her costume.”

“What was it?” and more than one person present listened intently for the answer.

“I shouldn’t want to swear to this, but I rather fancy she represented ‘Winter.’ Her dress was white and sparkling, and her slippers were white with spangles like hoarfrost. And on her head was a sort of glistening headdress that sparkled, too.”

“Yes?” and the examiner turned quickly to Kate Vallon. “Do you know of any one who came dressed as ‘Winter’?” he said, hoping to catch her off her guard.

But Miss Vallon was seemingly quite ready to answer.

“There were three or four ‘Winters’ here,” she said, thoughtfully. “Two of them I know, but I don’t think they went home early. I can give you their names.”

Babcock was a bit regretful at her willingness, for he feared it meant merely a case of a “Winter” who went early to keep another engagement. Also, this tallied with the doorman’s story of the lady in white who left, frankly saying she was “going on” to keep another appointment.

He sighed, thanked Miss Goodwin again, assured her that he would call on her if he felt she could tell him anything more, and then returned to his statement that Mr. Locke must be found.

He declared that there was no conclusion possible but that Mrs. Barham had come to her death by the blow of the bronze book-end, at the hands of some person or persons unknown. But that evidence pointed strongly to the supposition that Mr. Locke was implicated in the matter.

He said further that there was a stain on the monk’s robe worn by Mr. Locke, which had been practically proved to be a stain of blood.

He therefore urged every possible effort on the part of any one desirous of furthering the ends of justice to do anything in his power to find the missing man, and stated that the insistent efforts of the police would be made toward that end.

He ordered a continuous guarding of the premises by the police, for he felt it quite likely that Mr. Locke would try to effect a clandestine entrance to his home on some errand.

And he warned his hearers that it was possible that Mr. Locke had already disguised himself, and that when or if found, he might be a decidedly different looking man.

He said further that he was empowered by Mr. Barham, through his friend and counsel, Mr. Nelson, then present, to offer a reward for any information that would lead to the discovery and capture of the murderer.

He said the details of this reward were not yet ready for the public, but he mentioned it in hope of bringing out some otherwise unavailable data. And, he added that though all present were now dismissed, yet some would be questioned again, and he asked them to be in readiness at any time for such interviews.

CHAPTER IX

MRS. GARDNER'S STORY

THE few days intervening between the death of Madeleine Barham and her funeral were as a nightmare of horrors to her husband. Yet, there was so much to be done that only he could do, and so many things to be attended to that only he could attend to, that, after all, the time passed quickly.

Nelson brought him the report of what had been done at the police inquiry, and Barham listened gravely to his recital.

"I've so many things on my mind, Nick," he said, "that I can't remember all you're telling me. But that doesn't matter, for I sent a stenographer down there, and I shall have the full account whenever I get ready to read it over. But you give me the salient points. I suppose they've no word from or of Mr. Locke?"

"No, they haven't, and that of course is not surprising. Of course, Drew, the artist is either responsible for the deed—or he knows who is. That much goes without saying."

"Yes, I suppose that is true," Barham returned. But his attention was distracted, as if his mind were elsewhere.

"Don't think I'm not listening," he said quickly, as he saw Nelson's recognition of his wandering mind, "but, oh, Nick, if you knew all I have to contend with. I wouldn't mention it to any one but you, but Mother Selden is driving me crazy."

"She can do it! You'll have to make some other arrangement for her, Drew."

"I can't, Nick. She goes off in tantrums if I make the merest hint or suggestion of any change. Oh, well, that's in the future. Just now, it's the funeral arrangements. Poor Maddy, if I could only have a simple service and just a few of our nearest friends——"

"Mrs. Selden objects to that?"

"Oh, rather! She insists on enough pomp and ceremony for a Queen of England, at least. And, I'm glad for her to have her way—it's her own daughter, you know, but she changes all the details every few hours. Now she's all for a vested choir, and when that is arranged, she decides on a solo by some prima donna instead."

"Can't you put her and her arrangements in the hands of some one else?"

"I tried that. I sent for her sister, Mrs. Beresford. And when she came, they quarreled the first thing, and her sister went off in a huff. Claudine's a good girl, she helps out all she can. Oh, Lord, Nick, don't think I'm complaining—but I have to think quickly to keep up with Mrs. Selden's vagaries."

"Good old Drew," and Nelson's sympathy was ready. "Suppose I have a go at her. Maybe I can drive some sense into her head."

"All right, try it. You've done about everything else for me. Now, as to this investigation. I want it pushed, and all that, but I can't do anything myself until after the funeral."

"Nor are you expected to. And, too, there's nothing you or I can do. It's up to the authorities. I think they feel that Locke is or will be in touch with that Miss Cutler."

"Who's she?" Barham looked up with a show of interest.

"She's a neighbor and a friend of Locke's. Rather an intimate friend, I judge. Also, and this is strange, she

was seen bending over Maddy's body before it was found by Mr. Post—no, it was after that—but before the police saw it."

"Well, does that mean anything?"

"I think not. The girl was frank enough about it. Yet, there are some who are ready to think she is implicated——"

"In the crime? A girl?"

"Well, the Chinese servant saw her stooping there—but you'll read it all on your stenographer's notes. That was a good idea, Drew, to get a complete record, like that."

"Yes, I have to have it—if I'm to help in the investigation. I can't be going down there—I haven't the time, nor the inclination. But, Nick, I do want to find out who killed Maddy—and yet—do you suppose it will bring about unpleasant revelations——"

"Yes," and Nelson looked at him steadily, "yes, Drew, I think it will."

"Then shall we hush it all up?"

"You can't. It's not in your hands. Now, take my advice, old man; after the funeral, put Mrs. Selden away some place—you can send her off on a visit—and then let me help you cook up some plan by which you can cover up Maddy's—shortcomings. There's a lot you ought to know, well, never mind it now—but when the time comes, we'll work it out together."

"Very well," and Barham looked stern. "I am ready to do anything to shield my wife's name or reputation. I can't take up the matter now, I've pressing engagements—but I will do just as you advise, Nick, except as to sending Mrs. Selden away. That I can't do, unless she's willing to go. If you can persuade her—for Heaven's sake, do!"

Nelson went off, and Barham fell into one of the brown studies which were frequent with him of late.

And not the least of his quandaries was the fact that people were acting queer. His own most intimate friends stood by him loyally. Men called or wrote or telephoned with sincere offers of help, sympathy and understanding.

But Madeleine's friends were aloof. Only a few of the women had called on Mrs. Selden, only a few had sent notes or cards to him.

He knew, he realized that there was something for him to learn about Maddy—something derogatory, perhaps disgraceful, but from a strange feeling or fear he shrank from knowing it—at least, until after her funeral.

He wanted to take his last look at that beautiful face with only sorrow in his heart, not shame—if shame must come.

Poor Madeleine. He thought of her only tenderly. He forgot all the unpleasant things she had said to him, he forgot all her sarcasms and insults, and there had been many of late. He felt that perhaps he had been more to blame than he realized.

He had not been blameless, that he knew. But, then—and always at that point thoughts came crowding that he could not stand, and he would rise and go about some other business, in an effort to distract his mind.

Mrs. Gardner had written him a short, conventional note of condolence. She had said that she couldn't bear to talk about it, and hoped he would understand. He did.

Rosamond Sayre telephoned to say that she was too upset and overcome even to write. Perhaps after a long time she could see him, but not at present.

"Why do they think I want to see them?" Barham wondered. Just because they had been his wife's friends was no reason to his mind that they should meet and discuss the dreadful affair.

One woman gave him an inkling of the situation.

She was a very undesirable type, to his mind, but he remembered that Maddy had resented his criticism of her. Her name was Gibbs, and from her he received a short, even curt note, that she extended her sympathy, and trusted that when the time came for him to settle up his wife's estate, he would remember that she was among the creditors.

"I suppose poor Maddy owed her a few dollars at Bridge," he thought. "I wish I had made more inquiries as to the poor child's finances. I thought I gave her enough."

And then, with one of those strange perversities of which human nature is capable, he felt a sudden wave of relief that she was gone.

He was shocked, horrified, ashamed of—this—but there were times when it came over him that he had achieved freedom—by a fearful means, truly—but freedom.

He hadn't time to analyze this thought, but he had time to be ashamed of it, and it was with real dismay that he took himself to task for such an impulse, and hastily set about doing all he could to make amends by offering honor to her memory.

But if Mrs. Gardner was unwilling to see or talk to Andrew Barham regarding his dead wife, she was not allowed to hesitate when the detective from the Police Bureau called upon her.

She promptly refused to see him, which refusal was as promptly set aside and she was advised to make an appearance.

"What is it you want with me?" she asked in a supercilious way as she swept into the drawing room and confronted Hutchins with a reproving stare.

"I must ask you some questions, madam, and it is

necessary that you answer to the best of your knowledge and belief."

As is often the case with those unfamiliar with police procedure, any phrase of the law carries a certain amount of awe-inspiring command and impressed also by Hutchins' air of authority, Mrs. Gardner came down a little from her heights of inaccessibility.

"The questions regard a certain side of Mrs. Barham's nature, which, I have reason to believe was more familiar to you than to her husband," Hutchins began, and it pleased him to be a bit intimate, a bit confidential in his manner.

His quick intuition had told him this was a better way to get at this woman than by mere insistence. And the result proved he was right.

"Yes," and her lips curved into a cruel smile, "we women friends of Mrs. Barham know a lot about her that her husband does not dream of."

"Regarding her Bridge games," suggested Hutchins.

"Yes—that is, the extent of them. Mr. Barham knew, of course, that she played—lots—but he didn't know, I'm sure, to what lengths she went to get the money to pay her debts."

Hutchins hated his task. He had many ungrateful duties to perform in his detective work, but the one that always most thoroughly revolted him was when he found it necessary to get damaging information against a woman from another woman. There was no escape, however, so he merely said:

"How did she get it?"

And the story that Mrs. Gardner told him was so incredible, so different from what he had expected, so much worse than the worst he had feared, that Detective Hutchins listened, heartsick and overwhelmed with sor-

row for the dead woman and sympathy for her surviving husband.

"You expected her here to play Bridge the night she died, then, Mrs. Gardner, did you not?"

"Oh, yes, she was due here at eleven."

"And when she failed to come, did you telephone or make any inquiry?"

"Oh, no; Madeleine was a law unto herself. If she chose to break an engagement at the last minute, she did so without a word. And it didn't matter that way. It isn't a club, or anything like that. We just have a friendly game now and then, and if any one doesn't come, there are plenty of others."

"You think Mrs. Barham expected to come on here after she had made a stay at the Locke party?"

"Why, yes, I suppose so. Mrs. Sayre said that Mrs. Barham told her she would be here at eleven or shortly after. But, as I say, no one ever depended on Mrs. Barham's word in such matters. She came and went, when and where she would."

"Did you ever hear her speak of Mr. Locke?"

"Never! It's the queerest thing. I should as soon have thought of hearing she had gone to the Battery as to Washington Square! I never knew her to go any place south of Fiftieth Street before! To a party, I mean. Who is the man?"

"An artist—apparently a gentleman."

"Oh, well, I don't suppose he killed her."

"Why not?"

"Why would he—when he doesn't know her?"

"You're not sure he didn't know her."

"Oh, yes, I am. I knew all Maddy's friends. He wasn't a rich man?"

"No, I think not."

"Well, that wouldn't matter, Maddy never got money from men. But I'm positive if she had known an artist in Washington Square we would have known of it. It could only have been as a joke—her going there, I mean. Somebody must have dared her—or—oh, I can't think of any reason! It is utterly inexplicable to think of Madeleine Barham going there—alone! If she had asked some of us to go—as a lark, I could have understood. But to go alone—no, I can't think of any reason—not of any reason whatever. Can you?"

Hutchins looked at her. She was a good-looking woman, not handsome but well groomed and well made up. She was capable and efficient, he saw, and of the type that has what has been called generalship. He could well imagine her sponsoring successful Bridge games, and he could also picture her as having small sympathy with the unfortunate ones whose luck went against them.

However, he felt that he could learn no more from her concerning Mrs. Barham, and too, he felt he had learned quite enough. So, without further ado, he took his leave.

A confab with Inspector Dickson took place soon after, and the two men agreed that if the mystery was to be cleared up it would be done through investigations starting at the Barham end and not from the Locke house.

"She's the one to run down," Dickson said, though Hutchins' more sensitive nature winced at this way of putting it. "The wrong begins with her—wherever it leads to. Maybe Locke is entirely innocent. Maybe he's shielding somebody——"

"The Cutler girl," suggested Hutchins.

"I don't know that Locke was interested in that child," the inspector said, meditatively. "I hope he is, because that might help us get a line on him. If he's in love with her, he'll communicate with her, sure as shooting. But, as

I see it, she's a hero worshiper and he's her hero. Which is a very different matter."

"But she must be kept in view," Hutchins persisted.

"Keep her, then. I incline more to the idea that Locke is somehow mixed up with Mrs. Barham's affairs. It may be indirectly—but she never went to that party without some big vital reason for going.

"You see, all her relatives, all her friends are dumfounded with amazement at her being there at all. Now, if it had been some foolish escapade, they would have known of it—or, say, have known of her predilection for that sort of thing. Instead of which, they're all open-mouthed with surprise at her going. Now, add the fact that she dressed for it with greatest care and even expense—that Oriental rig cost a pretty penny!—and you must come to the conclusion that it was a big occasion for her. It meant a lot to her—whatever the lot was."

"Looks that way."

"Also, from your own story, she hesitated, even as she was getting ready. Her maid says she almost gave up the project. But she didn't give it up—she carried it through. Common sense must tell us that she didn't expect to meet her death there—but she did expect great things of some sort. There's no other way to dope it out."

Hutchins agreed to that, and went away to think it over.

Moreover, he wanted to give the rooms another look, with the purpose of finding something of Mrs. Barham's, of indicative value. Perhaps she had left some papers—notes—no, she wouldn't do that. Well, any way, he went down to the studio.

He was met by a very much disgusted caretaker and guard whom Dickson had stationed there for the day.

"What's the matter, Glenn?" Hutchins asked, smiling at the chagrined one.

"Foiled!" the other wailed. "Foiled! and by the Chink!"

"Chinese Charley? What's he done? Vamoosed?"

"No; he's here. Charley, come in here, and tell Mr. Hutchins that yarn."

Charley entered, silent-footed, calm, meekly respectful. Had it not been for a gleam in the Chinaman's eye, Hutchins would have thought Glenn was imagining things.

"It was a while ago," Glenn burst forth, "and I was sitting around, when I heard Charley answer the telephone. Always heretofore, he's done that and then turned the thing over to me.

"This time I heard him say, 'Yes, sir,' and 'No, sir,' and then he hung up—and—guess who had been talking to him?"

"Who, Charley?" said Hutchins.

"Misser Locke," said the Oriental, imperturbably.

"Mr. Locke! What did he say?"

"Said Charley pay bills. Little small bills—papers, milk, so so. Says he will pay big bills. Says 'good-by, Charley, maybe never come back. Good by, Charley.' So I say, good-by. Dassall."

"'Dassall,' is it?" cried Hutchins, "well, that's just about enough! Don't look so done up, Glenn. What difference would it have made if you had been on the wire?"

"We could have traced the message——"

"You can do that, anyway, but it won't do a speck of good. Of course, he telephoned from some big pay station—Grand Central or some such place. Or from some corner drug store. And before you can do anything, he's gone and mingled with the crowd! No, Glenn, all you could have done would have been to have made a fool of

yourself over the telephone, begging him to tell you where he was! But, by Jinks, it shows he's a cute one!"

"Oh, he's cute enough. But I don't see such special shrewdness in telling Charley to pay the bills. Looks like bravado to me—unless it's a game to get us to leave the place here."

"No; I don't see it that way. I think he did it entirely to set Charley's mind at rest. Also, I think he told the truth about not coming back. I doubt very much if we ever set eyes on Mr. Thomas Locke again, unless we go out and fetch him in, sorely against his will."

"Then the game is up," and Glenn looked utterly disgusted.

"Maybe and maybe not. Now, Charley, you slyboots, when Mr. Locke tells you to pay off the bills and close up accounts generally, where do you get the money, eh?"

A threatening look from Hutchins' eyes made the Chinaman revise his quite apparent intention not to tell.

"I have the money already," he said, with his sullen hauteur.

"Where?"

"At my home. Misser Locke, he gimme much money—ahead—I use it till all gone—then more come."

"Oh, I see. He gives you a sum of cash for petty expenses."

"Yes—that's what he say—pettys."

"And you have enough—and a bit left over, eh?"

"Yes"; was the grave reply. "Enough and the bit. And my wages for next month."

"Ah, very good. The small expense money, your wages a month ahead in lieu of notice. All in case our friend disappears suddenly or unexpectedly. Very good—ve-ry good! So, Glenn, we may deduce, I think, that friend Locke was not altogether unaware of the possibility of

his going off—and did go off. And we must think that when he said, so pleasantly to the door man, 'Back in a minute,' that he had no intention of coming back in a thousand years!"

"Then he is the murderer?"

"Oh, we can't go so fast as that—but he must be in on the game somehow. Maybe there's a lot more to this than we thought at first."

"A gang?"

"No, idiot, not that! At least, I can't see that element in it. But Locke was—oh, can't you see Locke was—*is* something more than a mere artist?"

"No, I can't see it. But that doesn't matter. He won't be back here, whatever he is. Probably he's on the rolling deep by this time."

"Probably. Now, you continue to hold the fort here—and incidentally keep an eye on that slant-eyed innocent, and I've another errand."

Straight to Kate Vallon's the detective went, and learned that Miss Cutler had returned to her own roof-tree.

As this was only a pair of rooms, above those of Miss Vallon's own, Hutchins skipped up there and demanded admittance.

The girl who opened the door to him looked very different from the scared, forlorn young woman whom he had previously interviewed, and also from the girl who had testified at the inquiry.

She was, though not exactly smiling, at least in a satisfied, contented frame of mind, and Hutchins, though scarcely invited, went in and sat down in her tiny studio.

"Miss Cutler," he said, in that kindly way of his, "give me just a moment, without making a fuss about it, won't you?"

"Surely," she said, and sat quietly down opposite him.

Her fair hair, not curly, but with a wave in it, shook as she raised her eyes to his, expectantly.

"Go ahead," she said, demurely, and he could have sworn she was secretly laughing at him.

Like a flash the truth dawned in him.

"Pearl Jane Cutler," he said, and his voice was impressive in its earnestness, "I know why you've bucked up! I know what has happened to you!"

"What?" she said, a little taken aback at his speech. "I don't know what you mean."

"I do. I mean this." He leaned forward a little to whisper:

"You've had a telephone message from Thomas Locke!"

Pearl Jane went white.

"What—what do you mean?" she cried; "how—how ridiculous!"

"Ridiculous, if you like, but the truth. Now, then, what did he say?"

"I don't see how I can answer that, for I don't admit the truth of your—your guess."

"But it isn't a guess—it's a certainty. I know it. Nothing short of that would have given you this cocksure attitude—this little secret Bluebird of Happiness smile in the midst of all the doubt and uncertainty you are still experiencing! Come, little one, tell me all about it."

"No, I won't do it. You've no right to ask. Good-by, Mr. Hutchins," and with a graceful little bow, she rose, flew into the adjoining bedroom and locked the door. Nor would she respond to any further summons.

CHAPTER X

BARHAM LEARNS THE TRUTH

PERHAPS most people will agree that the dreariest experience they have ever known has been the returning to their homes after a funeral has been held there.

No matter how much some kind friend stays behind to rearrange the furniture and restore things to their natural and normal aspect, the house looks different—the place seems empty.

After Madeleine's funeral, Andrew Barham came into his house, accompanied by Mrs. Selden and several friends or relatives from out of town.

Barham would have willingly given a goodly sum could he have gone off by himself to his own rooms, but that was not to be thought of. He knew he was obliged to stay—to hear his mother-in-law and her guests mull over the funeral, as if it had been a social function. To discuss the flowers, the music, the people present, and every detail, down to the very appearance of the dead Madeleine.

These things having been worn threadbare by discussion, Marcia Selden next invited attention to herself and her lonely and forlorn life as it must be henceforward.

"You still have me, Mother," Barham said, kindly, as she bewailed her utter isolation. "And I shall always do my best to make you happy."

"Happy! As if I could ever be happy again, without my dear Madeleine. But I'm an old woman—I probably shall not trouble anybody for long."

A new black-bordered handkerchief was somewhat osten-

tationously flaunted and several feminine voices murmured polite denials of the last statement.

"Yes," went on Mrs. Selden, who was thoroughly enjoying her martyr rôle, "I shall soon follow my darling to the land beyond."

"Well, meantime, Mother," Barham tried to turn the trend of conversation to a pleasanter theme, "I shall do all I can to help you bear your loss——"

"You don't care that our Maddy is gone forever! You don't care——"

"Now, Marcia, stop that," her sister remonstrated. "It's unfair to Andrew. He and Maddy were all right—a whole lot happier together than you and your husband ever were!"

"Sarah, you hush! I won't listen to such slander! Andrew, will you put Sarah out of the house?"

"Oh, come, now, Mother, we don't want Sarah to go until after dinner, anyway."

"Dinner! I'd like to know who could eat dinner. No one but me really mourns our darling."

"Yes, we do, Marcia," her sister said, "but these things have to be borne. I lost my dear daughter, too, you know——"

"Oh, you, Sarah! You have no heart. Now, I'm a sensitive nature, an affectionate nature——"

"You are, Mother," Andrew said, sincerely. "But let us try to bear our sorrow bravely and help one another——"

"Andrew, you make me sick! You and your preaching! Pity your weren't a minister! Claudine, take me to my room. I must be alone."

"She'll stay alone about five minutes," Mrs. Beresford said, as Marcia went away with the long-suffering Claudine. "What are you going to do, Andrew?"

"I don't know, Sarah. I am more than willing to do my duty by Madeleine's mother—but, you see how impossible she is. Nothing I say or do pleases her, though I honestly try. Of course, I can't send her away, nor can I persuade her to go away. But I don't see how I can live with her. It was easier when Maddy was here, but now—well, I shall do whatever she wants."

"She wants just to stay here and ballyrag the life out of you," said Marcia Selden's sister, with true insight.

"Then she'll have to do that."

"And you'll stand it?"

"It isn't 'standing it,' Sarah. It's simply doing my duty, as I see it, by my wife's mother. But I shall most certainly reserve the privilege of going away as frequently as I like, for as long as I like. The house and servants will be at her disposal, but I couldn't bear to be here all the time."

"Of course you couldn't, Andrew. You're quite justified in going off all you choose. You might take a trip to Europe."

"I might go to Kamchatka! But I'm not deciding on anything at present. You must know, Sarah, there's a lot yet to be done in connection with—with Maddy's death."

"Oh, that—yes. Of course, that artist person killed her. Can't they get hold of him?"

"Apparently not."

"But you don't have to mix up with it, do you, Andrew? I should think you'd rather never know who did it, than to dig into what may be a horrid—scandal——"

"What do you know about Maddy's secrets, Sarah?"

"Don't you ask me, Drew. If you want to know anything—go to her friends—they'll be ready enough to tell you."

Andrew Barham went off to his own rooms to think it all out.

He had a small library of his own, quite apart from the great book-lined place Madeleine called the Library, and here he went and locked himself in, bidding his servants refuse him to all comers.

What should he do—what could he do, regarding several great and important issues.

Perhaps the first was his mother-in-law.

But that he soon settled. He would let her be the unquestioned head of the house, so far as management and home rule were concerned.

Then, if her irritable temper and unpleasant disposition made him too uncomfortable, he would go away either permanently or for long temporary journeys. It was a little hard to be pushed out of his own home, but his loyalty to his dead wife and his sense of duty to her mother made no other plans possible.

Next—he must clear up this business of Maddy's wrongdoing. He didn't know exactly what it was that people meant by their veiled innuendoes, but he proposed to find out.

Then there was that matter of the Thomas Locke studio to be taken up. What he should do regarding that, he hadn't decided. It would take a good bit of thinking.

He wondered if the police would ever track down Locke. If the artist would ever be brought to book and asked concerning his acquaintance with the wife of Andrew Barham. And if so, he wondered what Locke would say.

As Madeleine had said, Drew was always wondering.

And he sat now, in deep thought, his mind racing from Marcia Selden to Thomas Locke: from Madeleine to—well, to himself, Andrew Barham—who, after all, was the biggest factor in his wonderings.

Finally, he picked up the telephone and called Nick Nelson, who got around to him in the shortest possible time.

"Well," Barham said, after they had discussed matters of lesser moment, "now, out with it, Nick, all about Maddy. Tell me the worst. As you know, very frequently other people know more about a man's wife than he knows himself."

"I'll tell you, Drew," Nelson said, gravely, "because you ought to know. To begin with, Maddy played Bridge for far higher stakes than you ever dreamed she did. She would lose hundreds, sometimes thousands, in an evening."

"Maddy! Thousands!"

"Perhaps not often thousands, but almost always hundreds. She was what they call born to bad luck—always held miserable hands——"

"Oh, come now, Nick, hands even up in the long run."

"Not always. Not with some people. But, anyway, Maddy was an erratic player, and a wild one. . . . If she won a pile, she'd raise the stakes and lose it all on a final hand, or something like that. She had all the impulses of a born gambler—she must have had a gambling ancestor—and yet, she always paid."

"How could she?"

"That's just it. She borrowed at first, Drew, from all her friends. Her funny code of ethics let her owe a loan, but not a card debt."

"She wasn't unique in that respect."

"No; well, when she could borrow no more, when she had exhausted her mother's generosity—and purse, probably—she resorted to—I can't say it, but she knew secrets about her woman friends that she threatened to tell unless they paid her."

"Blackmail!" and Andrew Barham gasped in horror.

"You needn't use the word. It seems Maddy was just gay and laughing about it. She'd run in to see a friend, she'd hint of something she knew—and then she'd ask for a loan of a few hundreds—or more, according to the importance of the secret."

"How did she learn these things?"

"Oh, every woman knows her neighbors' secrets—and they often hold them over each other's heads, as a rod in pickle. But they rarely get money on them—they'd be afraid."

"Maddy knew no such thing as fear."

"No. But she didn't realize that what she was doing was really a crime. Well, then, maybe instead of paying her, some woman would tell a bit of scandal about some other woman—that would give Maddy a fresh start. Any way—that's the way things were."

"How did you learn it all?"

"Emmy Gardner told me. She came to me in real distress, fearing Maddy would get into trouble. Emmy asked me to come to you about it—but I didn't think it was my business to do so. I didn't know whether Emmy was actuated by real concern for Maddy, as she pretended, or whether in it was but malicious revenge on her own part."

"Good old Nick, for telling me now. The next thing is to keep it secret. Can that be done?"

"From whom?"

"From everybody who doesn't already know it. But, primarily, from Mrs. Selden. I hope she'll never find it out. She idolized the child, and it would grieve her so deeply."

"We can probably keep it from her—unless some busy-body tattles."

"Claudine knows?"

"I've been told that Maddy used her schemes on Claudine——"

"No!"

"So Emmy said; but the details don't matter so much, Drew. You can fix Claudine more easily than any one else."

"This explains a horrible note I got from a Mrs. Gibbs—saying she is a creditor of Maddy's."

"Well, ask her for a statement. Those women will be glad to keep still for fear something might come out about themselves. What I'm worried about is this murder trial."

"Trial? How can there be a trial with no one to try?"

"I mean the murder inquiry. The plans of the police include only two main issues; to find Locke and to learn all about Madeleine's past."

"Why the latter?"

"They think it will give them a line on the motive for the murder, and perhaps a hint as to the murderer."

"Wasn't it the artist?"

"Maybe and maybe not. I'm interested in that chap, Drew. Do you know, after the murder—I mean, supposing for the moment that he was the criminal—after the deed, he calmly walked downstairs, gave his masquerade costume to his servant, put on his hat, and walked out of the front door, saying to the doorman he'd be back in a few moments! Did you ever hear of such colossal nerve?"

"Never! How could he? Perhaps he didn't do it, after all."

"And then—he went out to Fifth Avenue, and climbed up to the top of a bus and went off."

"How do they know all this?"

"It seems somebody saw him—some woman who lives next door, I believe, and she was watching the revelers that night."

"And they've never seen or heard from him since?"

"I believe not—unless since I've seen the people down there."

"You speak as if you knew them."

"No, but I saw several at the inquiry, and they're not bad at all."

"What do you mean by not bad? I don't suppose they're Hottentots."

"No; but they seem really interesting. Seem to have more—personality, more brains, than some of our own crowd."

"They wouldn't have to be overburdened at that."

"I know it. And they say—that is, Mr. Jarvis told me, that Locke is a very worth-while chap."

"Not a heavy villain, then?"

"No; sort of a dreamer, and rather intellectual. Says he's a good pal——"

"Look here, Nick," Barham interrupted him, "if Locke didn't kill Maddy, who did? Could it have been any one that is mixed up in this other matter? This blackmail—yes, I will use the word. I never mince phraseology! My wife did blackmail her friends—and in so far as I can, I'm going to make good her debts and hush up the whole matter. I am responsible for everything Maddy did—just so far as I can be responsible. Now here's my point. If it could be that somebody who had been her victim is at the bottom of this murder business—then I don't want it found out. See? I'd rather Maddy's murderer should go unpunished than that Madeleine's name should be dragged through a trial and all that, whereby her life secrets must be laid bare."

"I see," and Nelson thought deeply. "But, Drew, it is impossible, as I see it, with the murder occurring down there, as it did, there should be any connection between it

and the Bridge business. No, it couldn't be. The more I think it over, the more I think there was some mistake. I mean Maddy was thought to be some one else—the blow was intended for another woman."

"I hadn't thought of that. It might be," and Barham looked hopeful. "It would be awful enough, but I'd liefer that, Nick, than to know that somebody really wanted Maddy's life."

"Well, the thing to do is to get Locke. Then, if he's the good sort that Jarvis thinks him, and if he didn't do it, he can doubtless help us a whole lot."

"But if he didn't do it, why is he hiding?"

"There you go again—round the circle! I don't know, I'm sure—but there could be reasons. Say he's innocent, but there's circumstantial evidence against him. Say he's innocent, but he's shielding somebody else. Say he met with foul play himself."

Barham nodded. "Ingenious but not very plausible. However, I doubt if he'll ever be found. And, in that case, they'll drop the whole matter, won't they?"

"Not so long as they can think of some other way to look. That Hutchins is an alert sort, and Dickson is a smart man. Also, they're interested. It's an unusual case—and a picturesque case. Forgive me, Drew, but you're so sensible, I'm sure you can see for yourself, that a mystery culminating in the death of a society belle, is more intriguing than an ordinary case of murder. Then there is Pearl Jane."

Barham looked up. "Who's she?"

"She's the Miss Cutler I spoke to you about. Did you ever hear such a name? Pearl Jane! Well, it seems she was found bending over the body and there was blood on her sleeve—also there was blood on Locke's sleeve——"

"Locke's sleeve! Why, you haven't told me half! Locke's sleeve!"

"I mean the sleeve of the costume he wore at the ball. The monk's robe—not his own coat. You see, he flung the robe to the Chinese servant as he left, and they afterward found a smear of blood on the front of it."

"What do the Square people think about their fellow artist? Do they suspect him?"

"They seem not to know much about him. They seem not to know much about one another. As Jarvis says, they keep pretty much to themselves and when they get together for an occasional hobnob, they just talk shop."

"I see." Barham didn't appear deeply interested.

"And then, too, it seems this Locke is in the habit of going off on sketching trips or something and staying for days at a time."

"I suppose all that's in my stenographer's report—I've not had time to read it yet. Now, Nick, as to hushing up this miserable business of Maddy's. Shall I go to see the women, and beg or bribe them to keep still about it?"

"Can't I go for you—I hate to have you subjected to——"

"I don't care what I'm subjected to—and, of course, you understand, it's for her sake—hers and her mother's. I could bear it, if I had to, the nine days' wonder and all that—but I can't have my dead wife's name held up to scorn if I can prevent it by any possible means. Any suggestions, old chap?"

Nelson looked at the man before him. Barham's fine face was set in that firm way his friends knew so well. Not so much stubbornness as bulldog determination and perseverance. Nelson knew that Andrew would move heaven and earth so far as he was able, to save his wife's reputation.

And it would be a terrible thing to have such a stigma on her memory. It would have been bad enough had the story been made public while she was alive, but to be disclosed after her death, and to fall heavily on the already overburdened soul of Andrew Barham, would, Nelson felt, be almost too much for the man.

Yet Barham's face seemed to indicate that he yet hoped to cope with this trouble. It seemed to gleam with a will power that would find some way to meet the enemy, to brave the impending disaster, to conquer the danger.

His strong white teeth were set together with a certain forcefulness of his lower jaw, that betokened to Nelson's keen eye not only a decision but a desperate will to make good that decision.

"No positive suggestions, Drew," Nelson said, in answer to his query; "merely a negative suggestion not to go ahead faster than need be. It's not at all certain that those women will tell—anything. More likely, they won't. Why would they? Everything they say against Maddy would implicate themselves."

"But others—those who know about it—yet are not deeply involved——"

"Oh, give them the benefit of the doubt. I don't believe they would tell just to make trouble——"

"I know them better than you do, Nick. I've heard Maddy and her mother talk gossip until my hair fairly stood on end, at the tables, of woman's inhumanity to woman. Yet, your advice is good in the main. I'll go slowly, but I'll find out and pay such debts as that the Gibbs woman speaks of; and I'll call on Emmy Gardner and Rosamond Sayre—they were Maddy's nearest friends, and see what they can do to help me."

"And ask them to try to keep the whole matter from Mrs. Selden."

"Yes; now, the thing is, the police. Do you suppose they've any inkling of this thing as yet?"

"Can't say. All I know is, they're trying to probe into Maddy's secrets, and—it's a house of cards."

"Yes; in more senses than one!" and Barham smiled ruefully at his melancholy joke. "Well, I can't sit still—I chafe at restraint or inaction. Let's call up that Hutchins and ask him. You do it."

Not anxious for the job, but ready to help his friend, Nick Nelson called up the detective.

Hutchins didn't know Nelson was at Barham's house, and was asked to speak freely.

"Well, yes," he said, as Nick intimated his interest. "I did get a line on that matter. It seems the lady was—well, she was pretty rash in the measures she took to—to replenish her exchequer! I'd rather not say these things over the telephone—I'd rather not say them at all—but as Mr. Barham's counsel, you've a right to know—yes, Mr. Nelson, I did find out some things, and when you want to see me, I'll come and talk to you about 'em."

"Tell him to come to-morrow," Andrew directed, as, with his hand over the transmitter, Nelson reported. "At your place."

So Nelson asked the detective to come to see him next day—and, incidentally asked him to keep the matter to himself, at least until they could confer over it.

"Never fear! I won't say a word, till I have to. It knocked me fair between the eyes! I never heard of such a thing before. No wonder what happened, did happen!"

Nelson hung up the receiver, and turned to Barham with a troubled face. He repeated his whole conversation with Hutchins, and said:

"I begin to think, Drew, that it *was* something to do with all that, that brought about Maddy's fate."

"But how, *how*, Nick, could any of our crowd be mixed up with that painter? You don't think he was a gambler, do you?"

"Oh, Lord, no. Jarvis says he doesn't think Locke knows one card from another. Those people never play cards."

"Then how, or why, would any of that lot have anything against Maddy?"

"I can't see that they could—but some one else might have planned to meet her there."

"Who knew she was going? Why did she go? How did she know of the place? Why——"

"Let up on that, Drew. We know she *did* go there, willingly, and purposely."

CHAPTER XI

AT THE STUDIO

AFTER Nelson had gone home, Barham sent for Claudine.

"How is Mrs. Selden?" he asked first.

"She's a little calmer, sir. But now and then she has a spell—oh, a spell! Half hysterics, half grief. And—I'm sorry, Mr. Barham, but I can't stay on."

"What, Claudine, you would desert at this awful crisis?"

"I should never have left Madame Barham, I loved her. But Madame Selden—I do not love."

"But stay for a time, Claudine, for my sake. What could I do with Madame Selden, without you? She wouldn't take kindly to a new maid, I'm sure. Stay a month longer, Claudine, at double wages, will you?"

"Yes, Monsieur, I'll do that. Don't think me mercenary, but, I want to save up the money for—for——"

"I know, Claudine, you're to be married. Now, tell me, did my wife owe you money—aside from your wages?"

"Yes, Monsieur," Claudine said, after a slight hesitation.

"How much?"

"Five hundred dollars."

"Whew! Where did you ever get so much?"

"It was my savings. Madame said if I would lend them for a little bit, she would return it with a large fee—bonus."

"You will be paid, don't worry. Claudine, did she say anything else? Did she ever say that if you didn't lend her what she wanted, she——"

"Yes, Monsieur." The maid spoke very simply. "She did. I understand—I knew it was a wrong—but what could I do? She knew something—ah, it was the tiniest peccadillo—but it was my Carl. He—he——"

"Never mind, Claudine, I don't want the details. Now, if I pay you double what Madame owed you, and double wages, will you stay with Madame Selden for a time—say, until your marriage, and also—say no word to any one of—of Madame Barham's affairs?"

"I will—yes, Monsieur, I will."

"Very well. Now, one thing more, Claudine. Who knew that Madame Barham was going to a fancy dress party that night?"

"Nobody—not even Madame Selden. Ah, yes, Madame Sayre came over—but for a moment, while I was dressing Madame, and perhaps she knew; I don't know as to that. When Madame Sayre came, my Madame bade me leave the room."

"I see. Very well, Claudine, you may go. Remember all I have said."

Alone again, Barham gave himself up to thought once more. The man did little else but think these times. He had canceled his business engagements, he read not at all, he refused himself to all but the most insistent callers, and though kind and deferential to his mother-in-law, he saw as little of her as possible.

Marcia Selden forgave him this, for she was now deeply engrossed in going over her daughter's possessions. Barham had given her all of Madeleine's personal belongings, even her jewels, and it was no inconsiderable gift. He had recommended that some souvenirs be presented to friends, but this was merely suggestion, all decisions were to be Mrs. Selden's own.

She was like a child with a new toy, and kept Claudine

busy making frequently revised lists of the beneficiaries.

It was a troublesome process, for no sooner did Marcia Selden decide on a gift, than immediately the thing took on a new value in her eyes, and she wanted to keep it for herself.

Barham, discovering all this, thanked his lucky stars that he had chanced to provide her with such an absorbing occupation, as it left him more time to himself—more time to think.

After hearing of Rosamond Sayre's call on Madeleine the night of the masquerade, he determined to see her, for there might be some bit of information to be gleaned from her.

The appointment to meet the detective at Nelson's was not until four o'clock, so he telephoned Rosamond to ask for an interview before that.

She graciously consented to see him, which surprised him a little, as her note to him had been really a formal expression of sympathy.

As he neared her house, however, he found himself dreading the call he had come to make.

Yet, when they met, Rosamond's manner put him quite at his ease, and he was glad he had come.

"You dear man," she said, holding out both hands. "I'm glad to see you—do sit down. I've wanted to tell you in person how sorry I feel for you, and how I wish I could do something to help."

"No, Rosamond—there's nothing any one can do to help. I'm grateful for sympathy, of course—but—the truth is, nothing helps. The awfulness of the whole thing is beyond all help. Now, let's be frank. I've come to ask you a straightforward question. You played Bridge a lot with Maddy, didn't you?"

"All the time, practically."

"Did she—did she ever borrow money from you?"

"All the time—practically."

"Pay it back?"

"Not always—sometimes."

"And—Rosamond, you've no idea how hard it is for me to say this—but I must—if you didn't lend it—did she ever threaten——"

Mrs. Sayre gave a broken little laugh.

"Of course she did, Andrew. She used to threaten all of us. You see, Maddy played in horrible luck, and she always wanted to recoup. But, good gracious, man, don't take it so to heart! That was nothing, that she should say she'd tell our little secrets if we didn't lend her a hundred or two. Why so upset over it?"

"But—but, Rosamond, it isn't so trifling a matter as you say. There's—there's a pretty bad name goes with that sort of thing."

"Oh, well, don't use it in connection with Maddy. Forget it, Drew, nobody is going to hold it up against her. Especially now—the poor girl is gone. Have you any—any idea——"

"Who killed her? No, not the slightest. And that's another thing, Rose. Claudine says you were over at the house that night, and up in Maddy's room while she dressed. Did she tell you where she was going?"

"I was only there for a minute—and—well, I may as well tell you, she called me over to ask me for some money."

"She did! And you let her have it?"

"Oh, yes, that is, I agreed to take it to Emmy Gardner's for her. I did so—but the poor girl never came to get it."

Barham mused. "What did you think that night, when she failed to come?"

"I—oh, I didn't think much about it. Maddy always did as she liked. Harrison went with me, and we spoke of

Madeleine's absence, but we didn't think of it seriously at all."

"No, I suppose not. Didn't she tell you, Rose, that she planned to go to the Locke place before she went to Emmy's?"

The man looked at her earnestly, as if much depended on her answer.

But Mrs. Sayre said, "No, I don't think she did. No, I remember now—she said she was going on an errand first, but she didn't say where."

"And didn't she have on that fancy dress?"

"No; she only had a kimono—a mere dressing gown."

"And you came right home, from our house—and you went right to the Gardners'? Forgive me if I seem inquisitive—I've a notion in my head."

"I came home, and dressed," Mrs. Sayre said, striving to remember. "Then I went down to my dressmaker's for a few minutes for an important fitting, and then I came back and picked up Harrison and we went to Emmy's."

"What time did you get there?"

"A little after eleven—I remember we were the last to arrive. Why all the catechism, Drew?"

"Nothing," and his brows came together in perplexity. "I just want to find somebody to whom Madeleine mentioned that artist chap. How did she come to go there?"

"Can't you imagine?" and pretty Mrs. Sayre wrinkled her own brows in similar puzzlement.

"No, I simply cannot. I never supposed she knew such people."

"What do you mean by such people?"

"People outside her own circle or circumstances."

"Well, apparently she did. What are you going to do, Drew, as to finding out——"

"The truth? I'm not obliged to do anything, Rose, the

police have it in charge. And to tell you the truth, I believe I'd rather never know the murderer than to have Madeleine's past dragged out to the light and all this miserable Bridge business made public."

"I don't blame you!" and Mrs. Sayre nodded her head, emphatically. "I should think you'd very much rather have the whole affair hushed up and utterly forgotten. Do have it that way—Drew, all Maddy's friends would prefer it, I know."

"It isn't up to me to decide," Barham said, with a sigh, and soon thereafter he took his leave.

"I still can't find out where Madeleine heard of Locke," he mused, as he went on to Nelson's office. "I can't seem to find out anything! Well, there's one thing I am sure of!" and by that time he was at the door.

"Well, Mr. Barham," Hutchins said, "your reward offer has borne fruit already."

"What, you've found Locke?" and Barham showed real interest.

"Not quite, but a man has put in an appearance who claims to be Tommy Locke's brother."

"Has he a brother?"

"According to this chap he has. But between you and me, I ha'e ma doots. You see, any one can lay claim to the relationship and, since Locke isn't here to pass on it, who's to prove or disprove it?"

"Can't you wait a bit, and see if Locke turns up?"

"Just what we're going to do. Now, Mr. Nelson, suppose you tell Mr. Barham your plan."

"Why, Drew, I've been thinking that I might go down to the Locke place and rake over everything. I know the detectives have done it, but I think I might find some clue they overlooked."

Barham gave a slight smile. "I remember hearing a man of your stamp say, not long ago, that he had no detective instinct."

"That's just it," cried Nelson, triumphantly, "I believe a man with common sense and a good pair of eyes in his head might find out more than one of these transcendent sleuths."

"It doesn't sound much to me—but if you're anxious to go, go ahead. What, exactly, are you going to look for? Footprints?"

"No." Nelson refused to smile. "No, but I believe in among Locke's letters or papers——"

"He hasn't any," said Hutchins.

"Well, that's suspicious in and of itself. If that man tore up or destroyed all his papers the day before he disappeared, then that proves, to my mind, that he meant to disappear. There's that."

"There's that," Andrew agreed. "But where does that get you?"

"That's what I want to know, Mr. Barham," Hutchins said.

"Oh, well," Nelson gave in, "if you two are both down on my plan, I'll give it up. What better can either of you propose?"

"I propose we give it all up," Barham said, speaking gravely.

"The whole hunt?" exclaimed Hutchins; "withdraw the reward?"

"Well, Mr. Hutchins, let us put all our cards on the table. You have found out, I understand, some very damaging information against my wife. Please do not try to spare my feelings. I can meet the blow. I am prepared for it. Just how much did you find out?"

"Since I know you want me to be frank, I will simply

state that I learned that Mrs. Barham was in the habit of using a form of society blackmail to extort money from her friends."

"From what I have learned, I believe that to be the truth."

Barham spoke with an infinite sadness in his voice, but with his head erect, and face impassive, as if he cared for no word of regret or sympathy from any one.

It was true that the man's sensitive pride revolted at the thought of any pity or even kindness. He preferred to bear his burden alone, and except from his very few near and dear friends he wanted no recognition of the state of the case, beyond the bare facts that must be faced.

"First, Mr. Hutchins, I shall ask you to keep this matter from Mrs. Selden, if it be possible. I think I am within my legal rights as well as ethical in asking this. She is an old lady and devoted to her daughter's memory. The grief of such a disclosure would almost kill her."

"Rest assured, Mr. Barham, she shall never learn it from me—or from any of our people."

"Next, I should like to hush up the whole affair. If this is not possible—with the full consent of the police—then I am ready to face the music—to let the law take its course. But, I am quite prepared to pay a goodly sum to have the case forgotten—and this is in no sense compounding a felony, or even doing anything dishonorable. It is merely an expression of my willingness to let the murderer of my wife go free, in order that the wrong-doing of my wife may not be made public. Is there a chance of that, Mr. Hutchins?"

"Not a chance!" the detective shook his head. "Of course, the plan you propose is out of the question, as you yourself would see, if you thought over it a little more. Also, the machinery already set in motion cannot now be

stopped. The posters are out, offering a reward of Ten Thousand Dollars for the capture of the murderer, or any information that leads to that result."

"Not for the finding of Locke?" asked Barham.

"No; I received your message in time to omit that part of it."

"Yes, I changed that," Barham said, in answer to Nelson's unspoken question. "You see, it can do no good to get Locke, if he isn't the murderer. I mean, it isn't worth ten thousand dollars to get him just to talk to."

"No," Nelson agreed. But he didn't quite understand. Surely, Barham had been most anxious to capture Locke.

"Now, go ahead with your hunt," Barham said, "and, look here, Nick, I rather cotton to that plan of yours to go and search the Locke apartment—and I believe I'll go with you."

"Good!" Nelson cried. "I'm sure it is a good idea, and I do believe we might find something of interest if not evidence. Shall we go now?"

"Would it be better to go at night?"

"No," Hutchins said, "let's go now—let's all go. I'd like to see how you people work."

"I don't dignify it by such a high sounding term as that," Nelson smiled. "More like playing at detecting. But there's always a chance."

So the three, in Barham's car, went down to the studio of the missing Thomas Locke.

The place looked much as it did the day Nelson attended the inquest there, but not much as Barham had seen it the night of the *Bal Masque*. Then it had been gay with lanterns and flowers. Now it was in its plain, everyday furnishings, and, though properly in order, and tidily cleared up by the Chinaman, yet he had not been allowed

to sweep or dust, lest he disturb what might eventually be clues or evidence.

"Uninteresting place," Barham said, glancing round the studio. "No color—no atmosphere."

"Now, I like it," Nelson said. "It is restful compared to the glaring and tawdry effects in many such places."

"Well, go on with your sleuthing, Nick, I'll watch you," and Barham sat down in one of the fireside chairs.

Nelson looked a little at a loss, but began to make a raid on a desk that stood in a corner.

"Here's a big bunch of letters, Drew, you look these over, while I dig up more."

But inside of ten minutes Barham informed him that the sheaf contained nothing at all but receipted bills for canvases, paints and brushes.

Nor did further search produce anything of more importance. Nelson went back to the smoking room—and, disinclined to go there again, Barham remained in the studio. Hutchins followed Nelson, hoping to get a grain or a nugget of information.

Left to himself, Barham opened a few of the cabinet drawers. Nelson had been through them all and, as he said, they held nothing but painting things or trifling knickknacks.

"Where's the Chinaman?" Nelson asked, as they returned to Barham.

"It's his day off," Hutchins explained. "Though he has most days off now. He doesn't seem to know what to do. You know he heard from Locke, Mr. Barham?"

"No, did he?"

"Yes, and Locke said he could pay the small bills—the Chink has petty cash—and that he, Locke, would settle the larger accounts."

"Then, Mr. Hutchins, you must realize that Locke will

never return. To my mind, it is self-evident that though he is near by—at least, in the city—he is clever enough to remain hidden.”

“Not necessarily in the city,” said Nelson. “He may have telephoned on a long distance.”

“Right,” Barham agreed. “At any rate, he is quite capable, as it looks to me, of taking care of himself, and keeping in hiding as long as he chooses. I think, if you please, Mr. Hutchins, I will take a look in the den. I hesitated, as it is a place of painful associations, but there is a chance I might see something of informative value.”

But when Andrew Barham stood in the little room, at the very spot where his wife was, doubtless, felled to her death, he could see no shred, no bit of evidence.

The tears were in his eyes as he turned away.

One of the heavy bronze book-ends still stood on the table, the other had been taken away by the police as the weapon of murder.

And then, still in a spirit of investigation, the three went into Locke’s bedroom and bathroom. Nothing met their eyes that offered any ground for surmise or conclusion. Slowly they retraced their way downstairs.

“Come on, Drew,” said Nelson, as he followed the detective down.

“In a minute,” Barham replied, pausing for another glance into the den.

It was by no means a morbid curiosity, but there were many conflicting feelings in Andrew Barham’s mind just then.

He wondered.

On the way home in the car—Hutchins having remained behind—Barham said, “I can’t see, Nick, that the police are making any headway whatever. I can’t see but Locke

has them just where he wants them—if he wants them anywhere.”

“Where does he want them?”

“Oh, I mean, he has things all his own way. Apparently, he means never to come back. There’s not a thing in the place of value—that’s what I noticed especially—there’s not a personal thing that he could possibly care for—oh, of course, there are his pictures—but I can’t imagine any one caring greatly for those.”

“Mere sketches, they looked to me—and yet, I rather liked them. Good, soft coloring, and all that.”

“All alike, weren’t they?”

“Pretty much. Well, granting Locke is out of it, and his stuff there, as you say, of no value, then—don’t you see, the police are going to concentrate all their efforts on finding out something in Madeleine’s past life that will explain the murder.”

Barham sighed deeply. “Of course they are. Of course I see it. And that’s where you come in. What can we do to stop them?”

“I can’t think of anything. Your offer of money went nowhere.”

“Nowhere at all. I suppose we can’t build up a man of straw for them to hang their suspicions on.”

“And it isn’t that now, Drew. Just now, they’ve enough of that scandal about Madeleine to whet their appetites for more. They’re like a pack of vultures; they want to get a lot of back history——”

“Oh, I say, Nick! That might apply to a newspaper, a yellow one—but not to the police!”

“Well, to these detectives. They’re so eager to get a feather to stick in their cap, that they’d go any lengths to dig up horrid old gossip to help along!”

“But, if the horrid old gossip chances to be the truth—

as it is in this case, who can blame them? Lord knows I want to hush up the whole affair—but if it can't be done, it can't."

"Then you think it must all come out?"

"Looks so. I can hush up the women—not one of that Bridge pack but would keep her mouth shut for a few hundred dollars. And they have an affection for Maddy, too. They hadn't so much when she was alive, but now they're tender toward her memory. It's the police who will make the trouble—and the reporters—and worst of all, the exaggeration. If they'd tell the truth—that would be bad enough. But they'll multiply everything by four and then double it."

"Yes, I suppose they will. Did you notice that picture of the girl—on the side table in the den?"

"No; what girl?"

The one I told you about, with the queer name—Pearl Jane. She had bobbed hair—rather curly."

"No, I didn't see any such picture."

"Oh, well, I think I set another picture over it, as I was digging about. That's why. Wild goose chase, going down there at all. But I really thought we might turn up something."

"There's no chance for clues, Nick, if that's what you mean. Whoever killed Maddy was too clever to leave a clue. That much is evident to me."

"Yes, and to me, too," said Nelson.

CHAPTER XII

CHINESE CHARLEY

CHINESE CHARLEY was proving a puzzle to the police.

As his wages were paid to the end of the month, his notion of duty kept him at his post until the expiration of that time. Then, he explained, he would go away and get another place—unless he had different orders from Mr. Locke in the meantime.

“You are in touch with him, Charley!” Hutchins accused him.

“Touch?” said the Chinese, blankly.

“You hear from him. He writes you? Telephones you?”

“No,” said Charley.

But Hutchins believed he lied.

Since the caretaker was there, however, Glenn continued to stay in the studio apartment day and night. This would continue until the end of the month; then, if Locke had not been heard from, the house agent said he should lock up the place until the paid-up rent had expired and then rent it to some one else.

So matters seemed to be shaping themselves to a general permanent arrangement of forgetting Tommy Locke.

Yet there was nothing else to do. Hunt was being made, search was being kept up, yet there was no sign of the missing man, except the vague reports of his telephoning his servant and friends. Nor could these be verified.

Henry Post declared he had not heard from Locke.

Kate Vallon said she had not, while little Miss Cutler refused to answer questions about it.

Charley was equally taciturn, and Hutchins despaired of ever finding out anything.

But the very day after Nelson and Andrew Barham had visited the studio, Charley, who was tidying up, suddenly gave an exclamation.

"What's doing?" asked Glenn, who sat by, reading a paper.

"Nothing, sir," and the Oriental's face was a blank.

"You Chinese rascal, you've found something. Tell me what, or I'll have the law on you!"

"Nothing, sir."

And "nothing, sir," was all Glenn could extract from the wily Charley. He watched him closely all day, but could get no inkling of the discovery he had made, if any.

The only effect it seemed to have was to make the Chinaman do some searching on his own account. Several times through the day, Charley sneaked into the studio or den or the bedroom, choosing opportunities when Glenn was elsewhere, and swiftly pulled out drawers, opened cupboards and rummaged in boxes.

When Glenn came upon him, he immediately looked as innocent as a cherub, and pretended to be emptying an ash tray or picking up papers.

"You're a caution, Charley," Glenn said. "I wish I could see into that carved ivory dome of yours."

"Yes, sir," said the imperturbable one.

That afternoon Charley dressed himself in street clothes and went forth on errands. Returning, he informed Glenn that he had been to pay the caterer's bill and also the house agent's rent.

Glenn looked at him, astonished.

"Where'd you get the money?" he asked.

"Found in—in cubby drawer," and Charley pointed to a certain pigeonhole in Locke's desk.

"What? How'd it get there?"

"Misser Locke—he put."

Apparently the Chinese was greatly enjoying the other's amazement. Though his yellow face was grave, the slant eyes were flickering with sly interest.

"Mr. Locke put it there! Are you crazy?"

"No clazy; no, sir."

"How do you know he put it there?"

"Note say so. Note to Charley."

"A note to you? Come, now, this is too much. Have you seen Mr. Locke?"

"No see Misser Locke, but get note. He put."

"He put! You— You'll be put—in jail if you——"

"Just for 'cause pay bill? Good bill?"

"Let me see your note."

"All burn up."

"Look here, you. Do you mean you found money and a note there, that weren't there before? That Mr. Locke has been here—and left money for you to pay his bills?"

"Thass right. Money for me, for Caterman, for Agent man. Dassall."

"Well, next time he comes——"

"He no come more. He good-by."

"Oh, he's good-by, is he? Well, I think you're making up this whole yarn. That's what I think."

"Yes, sir."

But Glenn didn't think so, he knew better. Though not for a moment did he believe the money or note had been found in that pigeonhole. He concluded Locke had gone to Charley's home—the Chinaman went home nights—and Glenn was sure that Locke had been to see him, and by judicious payment had stopped his mouth from undesired

disclosures. Anyway, Glenn decided, that was all he could make of it.

He called up Hutchins but failed to get him, and he went to bed that night with one ear alert, hoping "Misser Locke" would pay another call.

But his hopes were not fulfilled, and next day he told Hutchins of Charley's story.

"I know," Hutchins said, staring at Glenn. "There's something else doing, too. It seems Henry Post and that Miss Vallon have each had a letter from Locke. They were ready enough to tell of it, ready, too, to give us the letters. But, confound it, how has that chap the nerve to stay around here——"

"A letter doesn't mean he's around here."

"No, nor does a telephone call. But if he put that money where Charley says he did, he must be in this vicinity."

"Oh, I don't believe the Chink. Locke sent him that money by postal order or something like that——"

"That's neither here nor there, anyway. The point is, that apparently Locke has no intention of returning to this place at all. Now, if that is so, he's staying away because he is guilty. If he were an innocent man, why wouldn't he return and help straighten things out? I can't see it any other way than that Locke did know Mrs. Barham, and did kill her. His very coolness and nerve in writing letters and telephoning and all that, proves the possibility, the probability of his being just the sort who would commit a murder, and then walk out the front door, saying, 'Back in a minute.'"

"That's all so," and Glenn tried to look wise. He was an humble underling, and he was secretly elated at being thus talked to by the great Hutchins.

"Of course it is," Hutchins went on. He was really only

thinking aloud, and used Glenn merely as a target for his speech. "So I'm more than ever convinced that Locke is our man, and that his murder of Mrs. Barham was premeditated and prearranged. Now, here's that Yellow Streak again! What is it, Charley?"

"I talk you, alone, Misser Hutch."

"No, I don't think you will. You'll talk to me right here before Mr. Glenn. He's my brother and my father and my grandmother."

"Yes, sir. Then, Misser Hutch, I ask you help me. I know things."

"Oho, you do! Well, Charley, if you know things, I'm the man to help you. And whatever you know, out with it. You may forget it."

"No, I no forget."

The Chinaman was serious now, and obviously deeply troubled.

Hutchins winked at Glenn but said no word, fearing to disturb Charley's thoughts—which, on the whole, promised to be interesting when divulged.

"I have errand to do for Misser Locke," he said at last. "I no can do—alone."

"All right," Hutchins said, cheerfully, "I'll help you. Do we start now?"

But Charley looked graver still, and shook his head.

"It's to the lady," he divulged. "The pretty little lady."

"Miss Cutler?" Hutchins guessed.

"Yes, Misse Cutler."

"See here, Charley, is she Mr. Locke's girl—you know—sweetheart?"

"I donno. But Misser Locke he want his—his jewel thing—his Luckee—and Misse Cutler—she got it."

The secret came out in a burst of confidence, and his tale

told, Charley wilted. His waving arms fell limp, and his excited face returned to its normal stolidity.

Hutchins held himself in, and strove to answer casually.

"Oh, yes—that's easy. Miss Cutler has Mr. Locke's jewel—a lucky piece, you say? And Mr. Locke wants it. Of course he does. He'd have no luck without it. Well, let's go and get it from Miss Cutler. Or did he give it to her? Is it hers now?"

"No! Oh, no!" Charley fairly shuddered. "He not give it to her. She take it—Misse Cutler take it—from—from—dead lady!"

Charley's eyes now glowed with horror, even fright. But whatever the meaning of this strange story he was telling, he was certainly in earnest. There was no slyness now—no roguery. The man was deeply stirred by some emotion—some sense of duty.

Hutchins' own calm gave way.

"Miss Cutler took it from the dead lady! From Mrs. Barham? What are you talking about?"

"Go easy," Glenn warned him. "He'll shut up or bolt, if you're not careful."

"Right, Glenn," and Hutchins put a guard on his impatience.

"When did she take it Charley?" he asked. "When did Miss Cutler take the lucky piece from Mrs. Barham?"

"After—after she dead—oh, oh!" His long, yellow hands flew up and covered his eyes. Clearly, he was envisioning a horrible memory.

Hutchins' mind worked like lightning.

"Charley," he said, "who killed the lady? Who killed Mrs. Barham? Did Mr. Locke do it?"

But no answer came. The slant eyes seemed to be of glass, so meaningless, so unalive they became.

"If he knows, he won't tell," Glenn urged. "Get at it in a roundabout way."

The next day, Hutchins realized that he was taking advice from an humble inferior, but at this moment the suggestion seemed good to him, and he acted on it at once.

"Yes, Charley," he said; "yes—about that lucky piece, now. Was it a jewel?"

"Donno what you call. But like a flyaway. All same, dead lady had him in her hand."

"After she was dead?"

"Yes, sir. Then I see Missee Cutler take him out of dead lady's hand, and put him away, in her blouse. So."

Charley tucked his hand into his house jacket, with quite evident imitation of a woman concealing a treasure trove in her bodice.

"Charley," Hutchins looked at him sternly, "why are you telling this now? Is it true? If it is, why didn't you tell at first?"

Charley looked troubled.

"I like Missee Cutler—but," he sighed deeply, "I like my Misser Locke more. You make Missee Cutler give me lucky piece for my Misser Locke?"

"I will, indeed—if she has it. You say you saw her take it—from—here, Charley, come into the den and show me."

Hutchins led the way and Charley obediently followed. Glenn, after them, wondering if they were on the verge of an important revelation or if the Chinaman had them "on a string."

"Now," Hutchins said, watching Charley steadily, "Where was Mrs. Barham—the dead lady?"

"Here," and he indicated the spot where Madeleine had been found.

"And where was Miss Cutler? How?"

"So," and the Chinaman crouched over the place as one might who was intently examining an unconscious body. With his long yellow fingers, he made motions of extracting a small object from the hand—and so graphic was he that Glenn was horrified.

"Misse Barrum here," and Charley explained, as if he feared his dumb show was not intelligible; "Misse Cutler lean over—so—and pick Luckee from dead lady's fingers."

"Where were you?" Hutchins asked, sternly.

"Here," and Charley rose and hurried to the little back hall. Then, standing just outside the partly open door, he peeped around it, as if spying on the scene he had just portrayed.

"I can't seem to think this is all made up," Hutchins said to Glenn, in a breathless aside, "and yet it is incredible. Do you suppose Pearl Jane——"

"Killed Mrs. Barham? I do not!" and Glenn looked positive. "But I believe this dumb show business. Charley never invented all that. . . . Moreover, Locke is after that lucky piece—or whatever it is—and Charley, who is all devotion to him, wants to get it for him."

"When you get it, Charley," Hutchins said, "how will you get it to Mr. Locke?"

But now the shrewd look returned. "I do," was all the reply Hutchins could obtain.

"I was pretty sure that girl was mixed up in the affair somehow," Hutchins said, reflectively, as he looked at Glenn.

"She could be mixed up in it and yet be entirely innocent of crime," Glenn persisted, for his heart had been caught in the tangles of Pearl Jane's bobbed hair.

"She could. And if you feel that way about it, you'd better not go with me over to her place—which is where

I'm going right now. You'd better not go, anyway, as I propose to take Charley, and if we leave this place unguarded, friend Locke may come in and camp here."

"No such luck," returned Glenn, "I wish he would. But I've no desire to go and see or hear you bait that young woman."

"I know you haven't. But, listen here, Glenn. That young woman was found by me, crying, in that closet in that back hall there. She had a smear on her sleeve that looked to me like blood. When I went to see her a few hours later, she had washed the stain away—I saw the mark of it left. She said—or, rather Miss Vallon said, they had washed away a few drops of cocoa. Somebody else said, it might have been a red smear from a lipstick, every woman carries those nowadays. But I say, if that smear was lipstick or rouge or cocoa, why were they in such a hurry to eradicate it? Why did they notice it at all? Also, in that same cupboard was the monk's robe, which Locke had tossed to Charley and which Charley had hung up there. That, too, had a smear of blood on it. Now, add the fact that Charley saw Miss Cutler bending over the body, that he saw her take something from the dead woman's hand and conceal it in her bosom, add the fact—or, at least, my strong conviction that Miss Cutler has had one telephone message—if not two—from Locke, since his disappearance, and, perhaps romancing a little, remember that the girl was in love with Locke and may easily have been jealous of this strange woman—perhaps no stranger to her—oh, well, there's enough, to my way of thinking, to get busy on."

Glenn had nothing in particular to reply to all this, and taking Charley with him, Hutchins started off to see Pearl Jane.

But her little place was closed and locked. Nor was

Miss Vallon at home. The janitor said the two ladies had gone away together, and had left word they would be back in two days.

"If ever!" exclaimed Hutchins, when he heard this. He was angry, for he feared that, like Locke, the two women had gone for good and all.

The janitor reassured him, however, saying the two frequently went off for a couple of days, and he was positive they would be back the next day but one.

Hutchins had half a mind to get a warrant and search Pearl Jane's rooms, but he wasn't quite sure enough of the credibility of Charley's story.

At any rate, no one else knew of it, and if he could make the Chinaman keep quiet, and could pledge Glenn to secrecy, the matter could await the return of the two women.

So he told Charley that if he said no word of it all to any one, that probably the lucky piece would be recovered. But if he told—there was no chance of it.

This made the boy promise, and Hutchins believed he would keep his word.

Glenn, too, agreed to be silent, and Hutchins turned his attention to the Barham side of the question for the next forty-eight hours. It was his plan to work from Locke to Mrs. Barham and back again, hoping to get some data on one side that would dovetail with facts on the other.

Glenn slept soundly that night. He was not a heavy sleeper, usually, but after any mental excitement, he felt exhausted, and glad of a good rest.

Though on guard in the house, he was not required to stay awake at night, Dickson deeming it highly improbable that any intruder would put in an appearance.

Nor had any one done so, to Glenn's knowledge, though Charley's story of finding money and a note in the desk

looked like it. But Glenn doubted the details of the story and felt sure the Oriental had made up that part and had really received the messages by mail or in some such way, at his own place.

And so, when, toward morning, Glenn heard a faint sound, which awoke him, he didn't, at first, think it might mean anything of interest.

He listened, however, but he heard nothing more.

A moment later he saw or thought he saw a mere speck of light as if from a pocket flashlight held by some one in the den.

Glenn was a good watchman, and his getting up out of bed was absolutely noiseless. So was his progress across the room and into the little back hall. From here he could see—even as Charley had seen—the spot where the dead body had been found. And there, bending over, as Pearl Jane might have bent over, was a dark figure—a man, searching on the floor.

The tiny flashlight gave but a point of light, but by its single ray, the intruder was intently, eagerly looking for something.

Awaiting his time, Glenn continued to watch. The man's motions were so slow, his actions so deliberate, the policeman felt sure he could spring at him when he got ready, and still catch him unawares.

The man's back was toward Glenn, but he felt certain it was Locke. He could see dark hair, rather long, beneath the soft, dark hat. He caught sight of a flowing tie—these things, he had been told, spelled Locke.

Slowly, still, the man turned to the nearby table. This was getting pretty close to Glenn's hiding place, and he concluded the time was ripe.

The man reached for something on the table, and at

the same movement Glenn burst in upon him, crying, "Hands up, Mr. Locke! Come quietly, now."

The man raised an astonished face, and at sight of Glenn, tousle-haired, wild-eyed, and clad only in pajamas, gave way to an irrepressible smile, exhibiting two gold eye-teeth and then, quickly snapping off his little flashlight, he sprang aside, and made for the studio door.

But Glenn was too quick for him, and though it was pitch dark he was guided by the sounds, and the policeman slammed the door shut just before the other reached it.

At bay, the intruder met Glenn in a hand to hand fight—by no means a desperate one, but both men were in earnest and the wrestling was steady and forceful.

Glenn found his opponent was holding his own, and, incidentally edging nearer and nearer to the hall door, which, if he gained, would let him down the front stairs.

This Glenn aimed to prevent, but, finally by a sudden push, the stranger sent the policeman flat against the wall, winded and off his balance.

He recovered in a moment, but by that time the other had gone through the hall door, slammed it behind him, and could be heard running down the front stairs.

As Glenn opened the door at the top of the stairs, he heard the street door flung open, and when, after the shortest possible interval he himself was down at the street door, and running down the steps, no one was in sight.

Baffled, he looked one way and another, and just then Briggs came along on his beat.

"What's up?" he cried.

"Locke! Chase him!" Glenn cried; "he just got away!"

"Locke!" Briggs echoed. "Which way?"

"I don't know—he just ran out this door——"

"He never did! I should have seen him. Where was he?"

"In the house—upstairs—he fought me——" Glenn suddenly awoke to the fact that he was too unconventionally clad to appear on a front stoop, and made for the house door again.

"Chase him, Briggs," he urged.

"Aw, chase yourself," Briggs returned. "'Twas a nightmare you had. Go back to bed."

"No, it was no nightmare," Glenn returned, "but I know what did happen. He fooled me! He slammed this door open—and then ran back through the hall and out that way. We've lost him!"

"You poor fish!" said Briggs.

CHAPTER XIII

THE LUCKY PIECE

WHEN Hutchins heard of the nocturnal visit, he merely raised his eyebrows.

"I told you he was a slick one," he said to Glenn. "I don't blame you, though—you did your best. But he had the advantage in knowing the ways of his own house, and being able to run around in the dark."

"Aw, I know this house well enough," Glenn declared. "I haven't lived here a week or more without knowing where the doors and halls run into each other, and all that. But it was his fighting that put me out of commission."

"Jiu-jitsu?"

"Not a bit of it. But skillful, clever wrestling—like a professional. Why, I hadn't a show. He didn't hurt me a bit, but he just, well, he just sort of set me on one side. Then, as you say, he did know, even in the dark, just where he wanted to get to—and he got there."

"And fooled you beside."

"Yes, and fooled me beside. Of course, when I heard the front door slam open, I supposed he went out that way. And there, little cutie had swished the door open, with a flourish of trumpets, and then he had whisked himself through the house, and out at the good little old back door—so he had! Had the nerve to leave that flying open behind him, too!"

"Don't worry, Glenn, if you had caught him you couldn't have held him, and if you'd locked him in—he'd have got

out! I tell you he's as bright as they come—if he is an artist."

"Well, what next? He'll not come here again."

"How do you know? Did he get what he was after?"

"What was he after?"

"I don't know. What did he get?"

"I don't know that he got anything. But I haven't looked around at all. I was so sore—mentally, not physically—that I just went back to bed—and I'm only just through my breakfast now."

"Let's give the place the once over. I don't think there was anything of value for him to take—but he was after something and we may get a line on it."

"Why, of course, he was after his lucky piece—as Charley calls it."

"Yes—if it was Locke."

"If it was Locke? Who else in thunder could it be?"

"Might be lots of people. Hello, what's this?"

The two had wandered through the studio, looking for any bit of evidence and finding none, and now they were in the Den. On the floor in a corner lay a strange looking object.

Hutchins picked it up and held it out at arm's length.

"Well, I'm blowed!" he ejaculated, though he rarely gave way to such elaborate expletive.

But the occasion seemed to justify it, for the thing he held up to Glenn's view was a wig of rather long, black hair.

Glenn's eyes grew big and round as he gazed.

"That's it!" he cried; "I grabbed him by the hair once, and it seemed to slide! Gave me the creeps! I'd forgotten that. My heavens, Hutchins, what does it mean?"

"It means," the detective said, slowly, "well, it might mean something else, but I'll say it means that your friend

of last night wasn't Locke at all, but somebody rigged up to look like him."

"Yes—that must be it. An ordinary burglar, disguised as——"

"No, by no means an ordinary burglar! Rather a most extraordinary one! One who was so bent on getting in here that he made up to look like a man for whom a reward is offered! That's going some!"

"But it must have been Locke—for he came in with his own night key—that is, he must have done so, or how did he get in?"

"Well, a chap smart enough to make up like Locke is smart enough to get a key somewhere or somehow. But, why? *why?*—that's what I can't understand. It can only be that there is some incriminating evidence still here regarding that murder. Nothing else would bring about such elaborate preparations."

"Mightn't be elaborate. Just slapping a wig on your head isn't such a great game."

"No; but this is just like Locke's hair——"

"How do you know—except by hearsay?"

"That's so, Glenn, I don't. But all the descriptions of Locke sound like this thing looks."

"It was Locke, Hutchins, I saw his two gold teeth gleam. I've heard over and over again about those two gold teeth."

"So have I. Well, no burglar could carry disguise so far as that. It must have been Locke. I have it. He's had his hair cut, to escape detection, and coming back here, he put on a wig to be different from what he really is now."

"Pretty good—but not good enough. I'll tell you! It was that brother of Locke's. He'd likely have gold teeth,

too, such things run in families—and he impersonated his brother to get something here in the house.”

“I never thought that brother person was really a brother,” Hutchins said, gloomily. Things were getting beyond his ken.

“Where’s the girl’s picture?” Glenn cried, looking around. “Ha! It *was* Locke—he took the picture—the painting of the Cutler girl! That’s what he was after! Oh, these young lovers!”

“Bah, I don’t believe it. It’s too foolish. What was it. A photograph?”

“No; a little painting—pretty—almost like a miniature. I think Locke painted it himself——”

“I think he didn’t. He paints landscapes——”

“Some artists do both. Well, maybe he didn’t paint it—but it’s gone, and I’ll bet he took it. He stopped at that table—where it stood—the last thing before he left the room.”

“Maybe he took it then—but it’s of small importance. The fact that Locke is in love with the little Cutler girl—or she with him—hasn’t much to do with our finding the murderer of Mrs. Barham. That’s what I’m after.”

“Well, I think this wig business and this fellow that broke in last night are important matters. And I’ll bet old Dickson’ll think so too. Don’t pass it up, Hutchins—sleuth it out. If it was Locke why did he come, and——”

“And if it wasn’t Locke, why didn’t he? But I’ll tell you what we’ll do. Put it up to Charley. See if he knows anything about it. Maybe Locke always wore a wig. Maybe he wanted to affect that long hair business and couldn’t do it on his own.”

Charley came at their summons and gazed stolidly at the wig when asked to observe it.

“Whose is it, Charley.”

"Donno."

"Is it Mr. Locke's?"

"Donno."

"Did Mr. Locke ever wear a wig? Come, you must know that?"

"Donno."

And even threats of jail, or intimations of worse punishment could not move the Chinaman to admit any knowledge of the wig or even the slightest interest in it.

Nor did Dickson seem as much impressed as Glenn thought he would be.

He opined it might have been some sneak thief, who had donned a wig merely to disguise his own appearance, or it might have been a curiosity seeker, of whom there were plenty about. He could see no explanation of Locke's presence there, for if he wanted to come to his own house as secretly as all that, he would have disguised himself—not attempted to look like himself.

But Glenn persuaded Hutchins to take the wig with him when he went to see Miss Cutler—for, he said, she could tell whether it's really like Locke's hair or not.

"It's a mighty fine wig," Glenn went on, "and it was made in Paris—see, here's the maker's mark."

"That's nothing," Hutchins scoffed, "all good wigs are made in Paris. It's a very expensive affair, too, which proves that it never was made merely to look like Locke on a midnight marauding expedition. That wig was made for a special customer, and for a special purpose. It has since fallen from such high estate, and is, most likely, the property of an artist's model, who is posing as Hamlet or a Wandering Minstrel. By the way, like as not, it was worn here at the masquerade. Then when friend burglar

started upstairs, he saw it, somewhere about, and clapped it on his head by way of disguise."

"Oh, you can make up fine-sounding gabble, but if you'd seen that chap, as I did, bending over that spot in the den—you'd know he was no burglar—he was Locke himself, or somebody who wanted to appear to be Locke."

"You said that before," and Hutchins grinned at Glenn, as he registered extreme weariness.

All the same, when Hutchins set out for his interview with Pearl Jane, he did carry the wig with him, and he did hope to learn something about it from the girl.

She didn't want to see the detective at all, but he had told her over the telephone that she must, and that she must see him alone. He gave her no choice in the matter and advised her to be at home when he called, which would be immediately.

So he found her waiting for him, and, while she was calm, yet he could note an undercurrent of nervous excitement, and a frequent tremor of overwrought nerves.

"Now, Miss Cutler," he began, not at all unkindly, but decidedly, "I can't help feeling you've not been entirely frank with me when we have talked together. This time, I hope you will be—for I may as well tell you that unless you are, you may be questioned by other people who will not be so patient with you as I am."

"What do you want to know?" and Pearl Jane struggled hard to preserve her composure.

"First—what did you take from the hand of the—of Mrs. Barham, that night as she lay on the floor of the smoking room?"

Pearl Jane grasped her throat to stifle a cry.

"Now, don't do that," and Hutchins spoke a bit sharply. "Hysterics won't get you anywhere. You've tried them

before. Don't scream, or burst into tears, for if you do I shall only wait till you're over it."

"Aren't you perfectly horrid!" and the gray eyes flashed angrily at him.

"Yes, I have to be—to keep you from being so! Go on, now, answer that question, so we can go on to the next."

"I didn't take anything——"

"Look here, my dear young lady, let me say from the start, falsehoods are barred. If you're just going to tell stories, you can tell them to some one else. I've no time nor inclination for anything but the truth. I think I'd better take you over to the police station for a hearing."

"No, no—I'll tell the truth. But—but skip that question—ask me the next one?"

"This is the next," and Hutchins looked grave. "Did you kill Mrs. Barham?"

"No, no, no!" and again hysterics were imminent.

But the face she raised to Hutchins was so imploring, and withal so appealingly sorrowful, that Hutchins was forced to modify his manner a little.

"I don't believe you did," he said, heartily, after a deep look into her eyes, "now, have you any idea who did?"

"That I refuse to answer," and now the eyes flashed. "You can take me to the station or to prison or you can take me to the electric chair—but I shall never tell you if I suspect any one—any one at all!"

She lay back in her chair rather exhausted at the vehemence of her own speech.

She looked very young, she seemed very alone—but underneath her young helplessness there seemed to be a strong power of will that Hutchins began to see was unbreakable.

"You care for him as much as that, then," Hutchins said, his voice sinking to a whisper.

"Yes," said Pearl Jane, and her face glowed with a soft flush.

Then realizing that she had been trapped, she flew at him like a young tigress. "How dare you? You think that is fair—right—to trap me into an admission. Mr. Hutchins, you are more guilty of falsehood than I! You have no right to——"

"There, there, Miss Cutler, yours is an open secret. You couldn't keep it if you wanted to. Now, let me tell you, that it will be better for Mr. Locke in the long run, if you will be frank about him. Are you engaged to him?"

"No."

"Do you—or did you expect to be?"

"Those are questions you've no right to ask."

"Very well, perhaps I haven't. Now, Miss Cutler, do you know whose this is?"

He flung off the paper, and held up the wig suddenly before her astonished eyes.

She gazed at it as if hypnotized. She wasn't scared—she seemed not to be over-curious, but she looked at the thing with a mild wonder, as a child at a curious novelty.

"Where did it come from?" she asked, and gave a puzzled smile.

"Of whom does it remind you?"

"Of Mr. Locke. It is exactly like his hair."

"Do you think it is his hair? I mean, do you think he wears a wig, continually?"

"That's what I'm wondering. I don't know, I'm sure, but I do know that's Tommy Locke's hair, or just exactly like the hair I've always seen on his head. Oh, nonsense!

No, I don't believe he wears a wig habitually. Why should he? He's a young man."

"How old?"

"I don't know exactly. We've judged him at twenty-eight or twenty-nine. That's not old enough for a wig!"

"It is in the case of some people. Why do you smile?"

"It's so funny. If it is his—and if he hasn't another, and has lost this—how queer he must look. Do you suppose he is bald?"

Miss Cutler shook her own short, thick locks, and then she became serious again. "Where did you get it?" she asked.

Hutchins told her the whole story, and asked her opinion.

"No, it wasn't Tommy," she said; "it was some of the boys dressed up for a prank. It doesn't seem funny to you, I daresay, but the boys do ever so many things that they think are funny, but no one else does."

"But this funny person took your picture—the little one in the den."

"That one! Why, that is one of Mr. Locke's chief treasures. Jamieson painted that—how dare anybody steal it! Can you get it back?"

"But perhaps it was Mr. Locke himself who took it. He would have a right to, you know."

"Yes," and again she blushed that soft, pretty pink.

"Where's his lucky piece?" asked Hutchins, suddenly. It was his theory that these suddenly sprung queries brought results before the victim was aware of it.

"What lucky piece?"

"The one you took from Mrs. Barham's hand."

He could see the effort she made—but this time it was successful. She conquered her emotion, she controlled her voice and she said calmly, "Mr. Hutchins, you spoke

of that before. What makes you think I took anything from the dead woman?"

"You were seen to do so."

"By that lying Chinaman! I refuse to answer if he is your informant."

"But he saw you—he was directly behind you. You leaned over and took the thing—and in so doing you touched your sleeve to her wounded forehead, thus making the smear which you afterward washed out."

"No, you are all wrong—I did none of those things."

"Then—then you won't mind if I look about a bit for it? You see, if I look through your place and announce that I can't find it—they won't send somebody else to look—somebody with a warrant."

He hated to frighten the poor child, but it had to be done. He had learned the most effective way to deal with her.

"Look through my things!" she cried, staring at him.

"Yes; if you haven't it—as you say you haven't—you can have no objection—and truly, if I don't, some one else will."

"Go ahead," she said, and sat watching him.

In a perfunctory fashion, Hutchins pulled open a few drawers of her writing desk and work table. He wasn't really looking, he was watching her face hoping to learn from its expression what way to turn.

Nor was he in error. She fell easily into his trap. With no thought of being studied, Pearl Jane did all he could hope for. When he was looking in some places, she drew a long breath of contentment and satisfaction. Again, her breath would come quickly, her eyes turn dark with apprehension and her tightly clasped hands tremble.

So, he knew at last, that what he sought was—must be, in an upper drawer of an old secretary. He reached up

for it, and as he saw the look of utter despair on her face, he pulled out the whole drawer, a small one, and lifted it down.

But his find was not a "lucky piece"—instead it was something far more gruesome. For, wadded up in a corner of the drawer was a long white kid glove—stained on the fingertips with a brownish tinge—unmistakably human blood.

It did not need her breath-broken cry of dismay to tell him he had discovered her secret, and he came slowly toward her.

"Miss Cutler—is this yours?"

"No—oh, no."

"Are you sure?"

"Of course I'm sure!" indignantly.

"Then whose is it?"

"I don't know."

"Why is it here?"

She braced up. Whatever the reason—perhaps sheer desperation—she sat up straight, drew herself together, and answered:

"I found it on the floor near the body of Mrs. Barham."

"When you leaned over her?"

"Yes; I did lean over to see if she were dead or alive. I was horribly frightened, but I thought it my duty to see that, at least."

"And she was dead?"

"I think so. I tried to feel her heart, but I couldn't—there was such an elaborate fringe and tinsel on the bodice. So, I—well, Mr. Hutchins, I think I rather lost my head. I had never seen a dead person before—like that, I mean—and I don't know what I did. I grabbed the glove——"

"Why?"

"I think I had a half formed fear that it might belong

to some one I knew—that crime might be suspected——”

“But it’s a woman’s glove——”

“I know. But is a woman never guilty of crime?”

“Murder?”

“It has been known, hasn’t it? And isn’t the weapon that was used—a heavy weight, more the thing a woman would use? Can you imagine a man throwing that at a woman?”

“Yes, more easily than I can imagine a woman doing it. You are romancing, Miss Cutler——”

“I am not! I am telling you the truth. I was scared, even dazed at the awful situation, and I took the glove—brought it home and hid it—all because of that vague fear that it might implicate some one I care for—a dear friend——”

“Miss Vallon?”

“Yes, of course,” impatiently. “But I learned that she had her gloves—both of them—and then I thought no more about it. If that glove is of any importance, take it—I don’t know whose it is.”

“I will take it. But don’t think I can’t read you! You are trying to turn the conversation away from the main theme—trying to turn suspicion away from the man you love. Away from Thomas Locke. You suspect him yourself—but you want to shield him. That is why you went to the dead woman. That is why you bent down over her—You thought you would remove incriminating evidence, if you could find any. You opened her hand—the dead woman’s hand, whether you found anything in it or not. What did you expect to find?”

“Nothing,” Pearl Jane was sullen now. She kept her eyes down, her head turned away.

But, during the conversation, Hutchins’s ever busy eyes had found something else.

"Miss Cutler," he said, this time very suddenly, "was it the scarab?"

Her frightened stare told him he had guessed right.

"What—what scarab?" she breathed.

"Mr. Locke had a scarab—a lucky piece. Charley calls it a Flyaway! That's what made me think of it—when I saw where you have hidden the thing. And a wonderfully clever place! You are a marvel!"

"I don't know what you mean——"

"Oh, yes, you do know what I mean. If you don't—I'll show you."

Unfastening his cuff-link, and pushing back his sleeve, Hutchins thrust his arm into a globe of goldfish, and from among the little stones at the bottom, he brought up a stone scarab.

"A valuable one," he commented, looking at its Egyptian inscription. "And more valuable, I suppose, for its lucky powers. And the dead woman had this in her hand?"

"Yes, she did," said Pearl Jane, angrily, "make the most of it!"

"I most certainly shall," said Hutchins, gravely, and with the scarab and the stained glove both in his possession, he went away.

CHAPTER XIV

MARCIA SELDEN'S OPINIONS

DICKSON listened to Hutchins's story with a very sober expression.

"I may be wrong," the Inspector said, finally, "but I certainly do believe that girl did it. For, on the face of it, Hutchins, what else is there to think? She is in love with Locke—that's sure. I'm not so sure he is in love with her—and you know, 'a woman scorned,' is——"

"Is the devil and all. But I can't see that slip of a youngster killing anybody."

"It was done on a sudden impulse—that's clear. Nobody throws a heavy bronze weight premeditatedly. It looks like a woman's deed to me. Of course, this presupposes an acquaintance—probably more than that—between Mrs. Barham and the artist. But we have to suppose that—there's no other assumption that allows for her coming there at all."

"She could have come out of the usual curiosity of the upper circles to see what the Bohemians do at their revels. That's not an unknown proposition."

"I see you're prejudiced in the girl's favor. I can't blame you for that. But we must look facts in the face. The visiting lady had in her hand the lucky piece which is evidently greatly prized by Locke. He even sent a note to Charley to find it for him. Now, we know that Mrs. Barham had it in her hand when she died. Maybe she was killed for it."

"Oh, that's too fantastic!"

"Not at all. You don't know what that thing may mean to these people. Haven't you read stories about——"

"Yes—I know. The Idol's Eye—a great ruby or emerald stolen from a Persian god—but those things were real gems. This scarab is a curio——"

"Scarabs—certain ones—are more valuable than any gems. However, that doesn't matter—if it's the superstitious value of the thing—which I am sure it is. Now, say that Mrs. Barham was mixed up with Locke, say that Miss Cutler was jealous of her, say that Mrs. Barham did steal the scarab—isn't it at least possible that the girl, unable to get it back, and frenzied by rage and love both, picked up the bronze and threw it almost involuntarily, of course not meaning to kill her?"

"It is possible, certainly," Hutchins looked anxious, "but I wish we could find some other theory."

"I wish we could, too. But what else is there? Then you see, if the girl did it, and if Locke knows it, why, that's the reason he has lit out. He's afraid he'll be questioned, and he's shielding that girl."

"That makes Locke in love with the girl."

"Very likely he is. Perhaps the other woman was an old flame—well, I can't explain all the turns and twists of an artist's love affair—but I still think it was the girl who threw that book-end."

"People have no business to have such things around," growled Hutchins.

"Don't be silly. In a moment of blind rage, anything handy becomes a weapon. Look how often a paper-cutter is used to stab, merely because it lies ready to hand. Let's see the scarab, again."

With the air of a wise owl Dickson studied the ancient stone.

"I don't know much about these things in a scholarly

way," he frankly admitted, "but I do know this. If this thing is a real tip-topper among scarabs—and I think it is—a connoisseur would know all about it, and probably know this identical specimen. They're all recorded—the famous ones."

Hutchins looked surprised at this erudition on Dickson's part.

"Then we can trace it," he said.

"Yes—if it is a famous one. Take it up to the Metropolitan Museum, that's the quickest and surest way to find out. Now, as to the glove—and there's another sure-fire clue. Haven't you an odd glove in your collection of trinkets found on or near the spot?"

"Yes—and it seems to be a mate to this one. But that doesn't prove anything."

"Not alone, but in connection with the fact that Miss Cutler hid this glove, and the other was found right where she was seen to be—well, it's decidedly cumulative evidence! Now, what we want is some—even one connecting link—between the artist and Mrs. Barham. Until we get that—why, any other man at the party may have been the villain of this tale, instead of Locke."

"It was his scarab."

"Yes—that's so—and doubtless the whole tragedy centers around him. But, we must get a thread of connection, somehow. If you should go to Mr. Barham again—or to that Nelson—wouldn't they tell you if they have run across anything?"

"I should think so—but Mr. Barham is getting queer about it all. At first he was ready to move heaven and earth to learn how or why his wife came to go to that party. Also he offered the reward, you know, for Locke. Also, he was keen to find and punish the murderer. But

now, he's—well, sort of apathetic. Doesn't seem to care what we do, so long as we don't bother him."

"What does he do—with his time?"

"I don't know. Nothing especial, I guess. But he has taken up some of the more important matters of his business—he's a big consulting engineer, you know. He canceled everything at first—but he's picking them up again."

"That's natural and to be expected. Doubtless they're most important deals, and he really has to give them his attention. And why shouldn't he?"

"Why, indeed? Well, I'll see him to-day, and Nelson, and I hope to goodness they'll have something to tell me that will turn you off the track of that poor girl."

"I hope so, Hutch, but don't let your sympathy for Beauty in distress blind your eyes to facts and evidence."

With a shrug of his broad shoulders, Hutchins went off, hoping against hope that he could clear Pearl Jane. It was too absurd to suspect that pretty little thing—but, as Dickson had put it, there was a chance that she had lost her temper, and had thrown the missile—women were uncertain at best.

And Hutchins had to admit to himself that Pearl Jane was exceedingly uncertain. He had seen her gentle, pathetic, sweet—and then sullen and obstinate—all in the same five minutes. Yes, hers was a peculiar personality.

After due deliberation he concluded to go to see Andrew Barham before he saw Nelson. He didn't know himself just why he made this decision, but it was really due to a lurking hope that it would turn out better for the girl that way.

By telephoning, he learned that Barham was not at his office that day, but at his home. This was by no means

unusual, and Hutchins started off for the Fifth Avenue house.

He was admitted and ushered into a sort of family living-room, where, to his surprise he found Mrs. Selden as well as her son-in-law.

"I asked to have you brought here, Mr. Hutchins," the lady said, looking at him with a condescending interest, as if he were some necessary but unattractive piece of furniture. "I desire a few words with you myself."

She paused, perhaps expecting some burst of delighted surprise at this honor, but Hutchins merely made a slight bow of acquiescence.

"What have you done toward the finding of my daughter's murderer?" she asked, and her commanding air seemed to imply that she expected a full and satisfactory report of the police proceedings.

Mrs. Selden sat bolt upright, in a high-backed chair. Her gown was most fashionably made, though of the deepest mourning that could be devised. The hem of heavy crape reached nearly to her waist line, and the crape bodice had such a high neck and such long sleeves, that none of her throat and only her finger-tips could be seen. Her white hair showed large ornamental hairpins of black dull jet, and her handkerchief was as deeply black bordered as it is possible for a handkerchief to be.

Very aristocratic and very imposing was her appearance and manner, but Hutchins was by no means overcome with awe at her grandeur.

"We have done all that we found to do, Madam," the detective returned, speaking respectfully, but by no means humbly. "Rest assured, the work is going on—but so far, the evidence is slender and the clues are few."

"I am quite sure it is your fault if that is so," Mrs.

Selden spoke raspingly, "I doubt very much if your board or company or whatever is it, has put on sufficient men or sufficiently skillful men."

"Mother," Barham remonstrated, "Mr. Hutchins is himself the principal detective on the case, and his record is a fine one——"

"Will you hush, Andrew! I do wish I might be permitted to say half a dozen words without interruption! I know you want to do the talking yourself, but let me remind you that Madeleine was my daughter, as well as your wife. And, I may add that I am far more deeply concerned and anxious about the discovery of her murderer than you appear to be. Mr. Hutchins, have you questioned everybody that was at that infamous revel?"

"If you refer to Mr. Locke's studio party, yes, Madam, they have all been questioned."

"And you made no arrest?"

"No information was received from the guests that warranted any arrest."

"Ah, you couldn't have questioned very closely—or very intelligently. For it is impossible that my daughter should have gone there without knowing some one—somebody who was present."

"That seemed to be the case. Wherefore, we assumed that your daughter must have been acquainted with Mr. Locke himself."

"With Mr. Locke! My daughter know a common artist! Never! She might have gone there to see about having her portrait painted——"

"Mr. Locke is not a portrait painter."

"Perhaps some other painter was there who does do portraits of society ladies."

"I can think of none such," and Hutchins hastily sized

up this new idea in his mind. But it seemed to promise nothing.

"She would scarcely attend a party where she knew no one, merely to make arrangements for a portrait," he said, as if thinking aloud.

"Do not presume to say what my daughter would or would not do, sir. That is outside your province. Remain within your own rightful boundaries of thought and speech."

Hutchins looked at her. He had never been treated quite like this before. And, apparently, Andrew Barham didn't dare call his soul his own, even in his own home.

But Barham was by no means afraid of his mother-in-law. His hesitancy to rouse her temper was partly because he so hated the scenes she made and partly because he really felt a tenderness for the mother of his wife.

Still, he couldn't quite allow this. So he said:

"Please, Mother, try to remember that Mr. Hutchins represents the dignity of the law, and so, even aside from his own merits, commands our respect and courtesy."

Marcia Selden took him up.

"Andrew!" she exclaimed, "will you never cease scolding me? You omit no chance to reprimand me, to hold me up to the scorn of others. Shouldn't you think, Mr. Hutchins, that a man would be a little kindly inclined to one who is the mother of his wife? But, no, all Mr. Barham ever says to me is by way of fault finding and reproach!"

The black handkerchief was pressed against the tearful eyes, and Hutchins, not feeling privileged to side with either, said nothing.

Barham repressed an angry impulse, and said, with a kind but long-suffering air:

"Not quite that, Mother. I never forget our relationship——"

"But you'd like to forget it! You'd like to sever it! You wish I'd go away and live by myself."

"I don't admit that—but let's not discuss it now. Mr. Hutchins is here on business, I think. Perhaps you will leave us alone for a little——"

"That I won't! And have you cook up some scheme by which the crime will be glossed over and forgotten, and the mystery of Maddy's death will never be solved."

Hutchins broke in then with a definite determination.

"Mrs. Selden," he said, "if you will let me, I will give you an idea of what the police have done and are doing."

"Are there any new developments?" Barham asked.

"There are," Hutchins replied. And then, seeing no reason Mrs. Selden shouldn't know the details as well as Barham himself, Hutchins told the whole story of the scarab.

He told of the mysterious note Charley had received, asking him to find the "lucky piece." He told of Charley's futile search, and subsequent call on the detective for help. He told of Charley's description of seeing Pearl Jane bending over Mrs. Barham and taking something from her hand.

Andrew Barham listened with an inscrutable face and immovable countenance. He sat with folded arms, his eyes intently fixed on Hutchins's face.

Mrs. Selden, on the contrary, was nervous and excited. She said little, for, when she interrupted, Hutchins peremptorily bade her be silent.

Also, she, too, was deeply interested. She twisted her handkerchief until it was a mere wisp, she picked at her gown, and she now and then broke into weeping.

But Barham didn't look at her. He sat listening to Hutchins, saying no word, but seeming like a man in a trance.

Hutchins went on with the tale, and came to the scene at the home of Miss Cutler. He told of finding the scarab in the goldfish bowl, where she had so cleverly hidden it.

"Have you the scarab?" Barham asked, speaking for the first time during the recital. "Is it really valuable?"

"You know scarabs, Drew," Mrs. Selden said, "you brought some home from Egypt, didn't you?"

"Yes; Mother; but I'm not a real connoisseur. Mine are good specimens—but not by any means famous ones. Is Locke's, Mr. Hutchins?"

"I don't know. I'm going to take it to the Museum, and have it sized up. Want to see it? I doubt if it's what you call famous."

He took the stone beetle from his pocket and handed it over.

Andrew Barham examined it with interest; first courteously offering it for Mrs. Selden's inspection. But she merely glanced at it, saying, "It looks like all the others to me."

"I don't think it is a King's scarab," Barham observed as he examined the thing; "I'll just take it to my library a minute, while I look it up in a book I have."

He was gone but a moment, and returned saying, "As I thought—it is a good one, but not a royal scarab. Doubtless, as you intimated, the value to Locke lay in its associations—or perhaps a superstition—rather than in its money value."

He gave one more glance at the stone he held and then handed it back to Hutchins, who wrapped it in its bit of paper and returned it to his pocket.

Then Hutchins told them about the stained glove he had found hidden in Miss Cutler's room, and at last his hearers began to realize that the detective was leading up

to the announcement that the police suspected the girl of the murder. He had told the story slowly, for he wanted to catch, if possible, any facial expression or any involuntary exclamation that would hint at a knowledge on the part of husband or mother regarding Madeleine Barham's acquaintance with Locké.

But he could get nothing of the sort, and, though his quick eyes and ears were eagerly waiting, there was positively nothing to be learned from Barham's stony calm, or from Mrs. Selden's nervous agitation.

And so, at the end of his recital, he merely asked Barham his opinion as to the possible guilt of Miss Cutler.

"Of course she did it!" cried Mrs. Selden, not giving Barham a chance to reply. "Could anything be clearer? I don't know why you haven't arrested her already! It's so palpably true—she was jealous——"

"Don't go so fast, Mother," Barham said quietly. "How could this unknown girl be jealous of our Maddy? You're not imagining, are you, that Maddy had a vulgar intrigue with some artist? I can't imagine any such case as that—if you can!"

Marcia Selden was silenced for once. She could easily imagine the girl's jealousy, but she, too, was at a loss to apply that jealousy to her Madeleine.

"Nothing can ever make me believe that my wife knew these people socially," Barham declared. "I cannot understand her presence there at all, but whatever her errand down there was, it was something other than social. Don't ask me to explain her elaborate costume—quite evidently prepared for the occasion. I don't know anything about that. Maybe it was mere idle curiosity of a society woman to see a bit of studio life. But it is impossible that Mrs. Barham was there as a social guest."

His arms were still folded across his chest, his gaze

was still cold and direct, and Hutchins saw at once that, whatever the truth of the matter might be, Andrew Barham believed implicitly in the statements he made.

"That is true," Marcia Selden agreed. "I think, Andrew, you might exert yourself a little more to learn what took Maddy there. But I must agree with you"—she seemed to hate to do so—"that my daughter never went there as a guest. I mean as one of the social circle there. She had a later engagement at the home of a friend, so, you see, she merely stopped at the studio place, *en route*. Either it was to see about a portrait, or to satisfy a bit of curiosity—or both."

"Could it have been in any way connected with Mrs. Barham's—er— Bridge habits——"

Alarmed lest Hutchins tell something disparaging to Maddy, which he hoped to keep from the knowledge of Mrs. Selden, Barham rose suddenly, and said:

"That reminds me, Mr. Hutchins, I have an important engagement. If Mrs. Selden will excuse us, will you walk along with me—toward my destination?"

The detective agreed, and once outside the door, Barham told him of the ruse.

"You know much concerning my wife's Bridge debts," Barham said, "and, if necessary, it will have to be made public. But unless it is—or, until it is, I want to keep it from Mrs. Selden. It would distress her beyond measure."

Hutchins marveled at the character of a man who would be so careful of the sensibilities of a woman who so trampled on his own; but he only said:

"I can't see now, Mr. Barham, the slightest connection between Mrs. Barham's Bridge cronies and the tragedy of the studio. Unless such comes to light, her Bridge affairs need never reach the ears of the public."

Their ways diverged then, Hutchins going to the Museum to inquire about the value of the scarab.

The authorities there told him practically the same as Barham had said. It was a genuine antique scarab—and was worth perhaps a hundred dollars. But it was by no means a museum piece or an especially fine specimen of its period.

So, Hutchins concluded, Locke valued it mostly for some sentiment or association. This, however, had no bearing on its value as evidence against Pearl Jane Cutler.

That young woman put in a pretty miserable day. She knew not whether she would be accused of murder—or being an accessory after the fact—whatever that meant! or what would happen to her. She confabbed with Kate Vallon, and then she went to Henry Post for advice and counsel.

They could say little, except to express sympathy and indignation at the suspicion cast on her.

"You didn't do it, P. J., did you?" Post asked.

"No," she said, dully—"but if I had, I should say I hadn't."

These artists seemed not to have very deep susceptibilities. Both Post and Rodman Jarvis, though good pals of Locke's, had practically no help to offer Pearl Jane. In their circle, every man was for himself—and every woman also. They were not hard-hearted—they were merely cold-blooded and absorbed in their own affairs.

"They'll never arrest the kid," Post said to Jarvis. "Why worry? And, for all I know, there may have been some affair between Locke and the Barham woman. I keep out of such messes all I can."

And Jarvis, though ready to do all he could for Locke in his absence, had no wish to take up Pearl Jane's burdens.

Kate Vallon was devoted to the girl, and she wept with

her and gave sound and really good advice, which included, among other things, a sudden and secret disappearance.

"It's the only thing," Kate said; "that's what Tommy did, and you must go. I'll help you off, and I know just the place for you to go."

But Pearl Jane doggedly refused to do this. No reason would she give, and Kate retired in dudgeon.

Left to herself, Pearl Jane moped and worried, and at last, about ten o'clock, she began to think of going to bed.

And then her telephone bell rang.

"Hello," she said, listlessly, and an answering voice said "Hello."

Like a wave of revivifying joy, the sound went to her heart, and softly, as if half afraid, she breathed—"Tommy!"

CHAPTER XV

A TELEPHONED WOOING

"YES, little girl—it's Tommy. Are you alone?"

"Yes—where are you?"

"Never mind—it's all right. Now, listen, child—is that story true, about your taking the scarab from—from her hand?"

"Yes, Tommy."

"Why did you do it?"

"It was yours and you cared a lot for it. She had no right to it—had she?"

"Well—no. But I fear it's going to get you into trouble."

"Yes—I am in trouble. They say I killed her."

"Did you?"

"Oh, Tommy! Don't! How can you say such a thing?"

"Look here, dear, before we go any further—do you think I killed her?"

"Oh—I don't know——"

"Do you think so?"

"I did think so. I saw you run away—and——"

"That's enough. Then, at least, that proves you didn't do it!"

"Why, I just told you I didn't."

"Oh, yes, so you did——"

"How queer you are, Tommy. Aren't you ever coming back?"

"No—I think not."

"Oh——"

"Do you care? Pearl Jane, would you care if you never saw me again?"

"Yes—I'd care! But you wouldn't!"

"Oh, wouldn't I! Well—but, dear, the whole thing is such a mess. I wish I could see you——"

"Well, why can't you? Oh, Tommy, tell me something! Are you bald?"

"Bald! Lord, no! What do you mean?"

"Don't you wear a wig?"

"I do not! Oh, you dear little girl, the sound of your voice makes me long to see you—I never knew before how much I cared——"

"You didn't care—the night of—of the masquerade."

"I did—oh, Pearl Jane, I did—but—I didn't know it."

"And I don't know it now. I think you're cruel to tantalize me like this—and I'm going to hang up."

"No, don't—oh, wait a minute. What shall I do? Look here, Pearl Jane, I don't know when I can telephone again. Perhaps I can manage it all right—but if these detectives take to watching your wire——"

"Good-by, Tommy."

"Same little saucy thing—aren't you. Pearl Jane—listen—dear. If I tell you I love you—can you trust me for all else?"

"Yes! yes!" joyfully.

"You won't lose faith in me—whatever happens?"

"No—no I won't."

"Then just trust me—dear. I can't explain now—it may be a long time—are you sure you can trust me if you don't hear anything——"

"Forever—if need be."

"You darling! Now about the scarab business. Will you do as I advise you?"

"Of course."

"Then—then, dear, tell the exact truth—to everybody and in every particular. If you suspect I killed the lady, and if you are asked, say so. If the gloves are yours, say so. If you know anything about the scarab, tell it. Tell everything, but always tell it the same. This will be easy, if you tell the truth every time."

"But—Tommy, they will arrest me——"

"No, they won't. Don't be afraid of that. Shall I tell you why they are suspecting—or pretending to suspect you?"

"Why?"

"They don't really think you are guilty, dear, but they think that by accusing you—they can get hold of me. They know I love you—I believe they knew it before I knew it myself!"

"Didn't you know it the night of the party?"

"No! Hadn't an idea of such a thing! It's come on suddenly—and I've a bad attack!"

"Oh, Tommy—I want you!"

"Hush, dear—don't talk like that—I can't stand it. Pearl Jane, there's much more to this whole dreadful business than you can imagine. Or than anyone else imagines. So, keep up a good heart, and—what did you promise to do?"

"Trust you, Tommy."

"And do you?"

"Yes—until I see you—and after that—forever."

"Sweetheart! Good-by."

The voice ceased—and, in a sort of daze, Pearl Jane hung up her receiver.

What did it all mean? Where was Tommy? Why couldn't he come to her? Unless—no, she knew—she *knew* he was not guilty. Her Tommy guilty?

And then all thought of guilt or trouble was lost and forgotten in the blissful realization that he was *her* Tommy!

Was ever woman in this fashion wooed?

She wondered if any other girl in the world had ever had a proposal over the telephone. Doubtless such a thing had happened, but not like hers! She was sure that her experience was unique—and, at any rate, it made her very happy. Now, she must plan her life.

She must not be afraid of the police—Tommy had said so. She must stay right there in these same rooms—Tommy might telephone again.

But whether he did or didn't, whether she heard from him again in a week or not for a year—she would always trust him.

For—he loved her! He had told her so. Oh—when she should see him—she'd take a sweet revenge for all this mystery!

And she was to tell the truth. This was a real relief, for Pearl Jane was not a very successful liar, and she was apt to forget and get her stories mixed up. But hereafter—Tommy said—she was to tell the truth—and she was not to fear.

Must she tell of this conversation with him?

That was a problem. But she fell asleep on the decision that she would tell the truth if asked—but if not, she had no intention of sharing her beautiful heart-secret with anybody just yet.

It was the next day that a man came to Andrew Barham's house with a request that he might have an interview, if only a few moments.

Barham received him in his little library, curious to know if any news regarding the mystery might be forthcoming.

"My name is Locke," the caller said. "I'm the brother of the artist who has disappeared."

"That's very interesting," Barham said, non-committally; "what can I do for you?"

"You can do this, Mr. Barham. You can use your influence to get the authorities to turn over to me any belongings or estate my brother had. I'm his only heir—but Tom lived so much to himself, and so quiet-like, I've no letters or such, to prove my claim. Now, if an influential man like yourself, sir, would just say a word to the police, they'd give me poor Tom's clothes and furniture and suchlike. I don't want anything they'd be likely to need for evidence—but I'm a poor man, sir, and I could do with a bit more. Especially when it belonged to my own brother."

"So you're Locke's brother." Barham looked at him appraisingly. "Are you older than he?"

"Only a year or so older. We were boys together."

"Ah, yes, of course. Now, where did you live, as boys?"

"In Kansas City."

"And your father's name was?"

"John—John Locke. He was a minister, sir."

"Oh, he was? Well, Mr. Locke, one more question. What was your mother's maiden name?"

"Hester—Hester Miller."

"A Kansas City woman?"

"Yes sir." The caller began to fidget a little under this direct catechism, and Andrew Barham smiled.

Then he said, "I think there's some mistake, Mr.—er—Locke. Your brother cannot be the artist we are interested in. You see, the artist, Tommy Locke, was born in Massachusetts. His mother's maiden name was Jeannette Fessenden, and his father was a fire-insurance agent. So

I will ask you to excuse me, and bid you a very good-day."

Barham turned back to his desk and took up his pen.

"But, sir—" the man began, "won't you please——"

Barham turned back and looked at him. "I said good-day," he reminded him, and with his penhandle, he pointed toward the door.

The man departed, and strange to say was never heard of again by Barham or the police either.

"Good game—but it didn't work," Andrew Barham advised himself.

Nick Nelson came in later.

"I've been trying to find that brother of Locke's," he said, "I thought I might get a line on the artist through him.

Barham laughed, the first time Nick had seen him laugh since the tragedy.

"You'll probably never see him again," he said, and then he related the incident as it happened.

"Why were you so sure he was an impostor?" Nelson asked.

"Oh, he had all the earmarks of the professional vulture. They run around to find people who die or disappear without relatives, and then they try to claim the property. Sometimes they get away with it, and sometimes they don't."

"What did you tell him all those other names for? Did you make them up?"

"Of course. I did it to prove myself right. If he had been Locke's brother, don't you suppose he would have insisted on his own genealogy? He made up his ancestors' names, so I had an equal right to make up another set for the missing man."

"The police cottoned to him, because he had some gold teeth—and so has Tommy Locke," said Nick.

"Absurd. We aren't born with gold teeth in our mouths—I suppose heredity might make two brothers lose the same teeth—but, well if the police need him in their business, I'm sorry I sent him off."

"No; I fancy they owe you a debt of gratitude. Another queer thing has turned up. You know that scarab?"

"Yes—I have seen it. Nothing very valuable."

"No; so I'm told. But the little girl says it has been changed."

"Changed—what do you mean?"

"She says the scarab Locke owned was a Royal scarab—from a King's tomb. And, the one Hutchins has now, the girl says, is quite another stone."

"Does the girl know about such things?"

"I don't think she is a connoisseur at all, but she probably knows what Locke told her."

"Ah, yes—what Locke told her. But, Nick, isn't it conceivable that Locke described his treasure as being of a higher value than it really was? Can't you see him, desiring to impress his artist friends, claiming a royal history for a scarab that was merely a poor commoner?"

"That's easy, too. But the girl declares she knows that the one Hutchins has now—is not the one she gave him."

"That girl seems bound to make trouble. What's she like, Nick?"

"Lord, Andrew, I've described her to you half a dozen times. Like an Art Student—of course. Big eyes, bobbed hair, little turn-up nose, and a skin like a satin rose-leaf——"

"Hold hard, Nick, you sound like an interested observer!"

"No; I'm telling you the truth. You don't see that sort of skin among our sort of women."

"Could be, if they didn't overdo the rouge pots."

"No, it's different. Healthier. Well, as for the rest, she's a little thing—and she dresses in that studio style, but she gets away with it. And—she's nobody's fool."

"Just what do you mean by that?"

"I mean she's sensible and straightforward—though I believe if you'd know her well, she's full of the devil—capers, I mean. She has a jolly little gleam in her eye——"

"Well, considering you saw her only once, at the Inquest, you took her in rather completely."

"Do quit fumbling in that desk drawer, Drew! What is the matter with you? Are you hunting for a letter or something?"

"No," and Barham let go the papers, and pushed the drawer shut. "Go on, Nick. You're here for something special. Out with it."

"All right—out it is. The truth is, Drew, Hutchins thinks you exchanged those scarabs. He thinks when you took Locke's into the other room to look it up in your book, that you substituted a less valuable stone."

"Oh, he does, does he? Well, old chap, what do you think? Am I given to petty thievery? Would I be likely to steal a scarab from a poor artist—or from the police?"

"Of course not, Drew, don't be silly. But I thought maybe you could help trace it. I think that somehow Locke has managed to get it back and he has made the substitution."

"You're sure there was a substitution?"

"It looks that way. The girl described minutely the design on Locke's scarab—she says he did consider it his lucky piece—and the figures on the one Hutchins has now are quite dissimilar."

"My dear Nick, no one who hasn't studied scarabs can tell one from another—least of all, a little bob-haired girl with a turn-up nose. Why not suspect the Chinaman. He had the job of finding the thing, I'm told. Say he found it, and—those Orientals are tricky, and they know about curios—say he made the substitution. How's that?"

"I don't think he has seen it?"

"But you don't know that he hasn't."

"No. Oh, well, I dare say it's the same old scarab. Also I guess they'll arrest the little girl soon, and then there'll be a sensation. Somehow I hate to see her arrested. A mere child——"

"How can they arrest her? They've no real evidence."

"They hold that they have. The Chinaman saw her bending over the body. He saw her take the scarab, which afterward was found hidden in her room. Also, the pair of stained gloves are her size. Also the bronze book-end has been photographed for finger prints—and it shows the prints of Miss Cutler's fingers."

"I don't believe it!" Andrew Barham sat up straight, and spoke so strongly that Nelson looked at him curiously.

"Why, Drew, what's the great excitement?"

"Only that I'm a champion of women—all women, as you know. And I think it's outrageous to arrest that girl—almost a child, you tell me—for a crime of that sort!"

"Don't say 'of that sort' for it's just the sort of weapon a woman would use."

"But why, *why* would that girl kill Maddy? Why—answer me that!"

"Good Lord, I can't answer that! If I could, I'd have the whole problem solved. Will you stop fumbling in that

drawer? If you've lost a paper, hunt for it—do. But quit poking aimlessly about among the old documents.”

Again Barham slammed the drawer shut.

“There's no reason why that girl could possibly have killed Madeleine, unless it was jealousy. Now, I hold she couldn't have been jealous of my wife, for my wife had no knowledge of those people at all—she had no acquaintance down there.”

“To your knowledge.”

“To my knowledge, or outside it. I didn't live with Madeleine all those years without knowing her whole mind—and she would never have chummed with those people—never!”

“Maybe she went down there with some of our own crowd—curiosity, you know. Maybe we can find out who went with her. Have you tried?”

“I've asked a few of the women—but they won't tell—if they know, which I doubt.”

“Claudine would know.”

“I've asked her, but she gave me no real information.”

“Get her down here—now. I've a ghost of an idea that she knows more than she has told.”

The maid was sent for, and appeared, looking a little scared.

“Don't be frightened, Claudine,” Barham said, kindly. He couldn't bear to see any woman troubled.

“Just a few questions, Claudine,” Nelson began. “Tell us, briefly, all you know of Madame's going to the masked ball.”

“I know almost nothing. She had her costume made—perhaps a week beforehand—not more.”

“It was done hastily, then?”

“Yes, Madame usually gave more time than that to her modiste.”

"Then you think Mrs. Barham knew she was going fully a week before the party."

"Yes, Monsieur."

"And during that week she didn't mention the party to you?"

"Not once. Nor to any one. Not to Madame Selden, nor to Madame Gardner, who was here once in my presence."

"And she said nothing of it to Mr. Barham?"

"Not in my presence."

"Then, now think very carefully, Claudine, you never heard her speak of it to any one—not over the telephone, even?"

"No"; but a telltale flush that reddened the maid's cheeks aroused Nelson's suspicions.

"Tell the truth," he commanded, sternly. "You do know of some one——"

"I will tell—it is perhaps my duty."

"Yes, Claudine, tell what you know," Barham assisted her.

"Well, then, the night of the *Bal Masque*—Madame Sayre came to see Madame, and they sent me from the room while they talked. I——"

"Of course, Claudine, you listened," Nelson said, in a matter-of-fact way. "Well, what did you hear?"

"It is not my habit to listen——"

"Oh, no, of course not—we understand all that. Go on, now, and we'll forgive your listening, if you tell exactly what you heard."

"But I heard so little. Madame was very secret with her message, and Madame Sayre was equally careful. I heard almost nothing of their talk. But I did hear my Madame say to Madame Sayre that she was going to the *Bal Masque* and she did tell her where it was to be."

"And was Madame Sayre surprised?" Nelson asked.

"That I can't say—I could hear so little. Indeed, I heard but few actual words, but I did hear Washington Square—of that I am sure."

"But Madame Barham did not tell you she was going there?"

"No, Monsieur Nelson, she did not. I have told all."

"You may go, Claudine," and the maid left the room.

"All of no use, Nick," Barham said, wearily. "I knew all that before, practically, from Rosamond Sayre herself. Maddy sent for her—to borrow some money. And Maddy brought influence to bear—or, at least, I suppose she did, Rose didn't say that—but she did say that she promised to take the money to Maddy at Emmy Gardner's that evening. They were both going there to play. Rosamond did go, and Maddy, of course, never showed up. So Claudine gave us no news. Can't we drop the whole thing, Nick? I mean, can't we get out of any active part in it? Of course, the police——"

"Well, all right, Drew; but you asked me to help you look into these things. You asked me to help you find the murderer of your wife. You asked me to represent you in the matter, and use my judgment as to what should be done so far as we had any choice of procedure. I've done these things—I mean I've tried to do them. I've used all the means at my disposal to accede to your demands and now you're——"

"Well, I'm what?"

"I don't know, exactly—but, you're queer—that's what you are—queer."

"I dare say I am, Nick. Forgive me, old chap."

And then Barham dropped his head into his hands and sat for a moment, looking so dejected and so despairing that Nelson was sorry for him.

"No, forgive me, Drew. I know what awful burdens you have to bear."

"Pshaw—I'm not whining. I have problems—but they must be faced. I can face them. What I'd like, would be to run away for a day or two and think things out by myself. How'd that be?"

"Well—" Nelson hesitated, "don't go until after they've settled their minds about that scarab business. You don't seem to realize, Drew, they really think you took a rare one and returned to Hutchins a much less valuable specimen."

"Aren't they coming to me with this tale? Aren't they going to accuse me to my face?"

"Yes, I think they are. What shall you say?"

"What can I say, but the truth?"

"And that is?"

"What do you think?"

"I think you exchanged the scarabs."

"Yes—I did."

CHAPTER XVI

LORIMER LANE

NICK NELSON was not an astute man—he was not even sharp-sighted when it came to puzzling things out, but he had unbounded faith in his friends and unflinching loyalty.

He accepted at its face value Barham's statement that he had exchanged the scarabs. He didn't question him concerning the matter, he only thought it over afterward and decided on his own line of action.

This was neither more nor less than to put the matter up to an expert. Nelson couldn't understand Barham—very well, then somebody else should explain him.

From Nelson's point of view this was no disloyalty or treachery to his friend, for, as he had reasoned it out, Barham was queer, and if people were queer they must be investigated.

His faith in Barham was so absolute that though he knew the man had exchanged a fine scarab for one of lesser value, he did not for a single instant believe this meant any dishonesty or real wrong-doing.

Had he been asked, he couldn't have said what he did believe regarding the incident, but, he thought, there must be some logical and satisfactory explanation for old Barham's deed. Maybe the fine scarab was his and had been stolen from him—well, that did seem a bit far-fetched—but, anyway, Drew Barham was all right—and if he was so foolish as to let himself be suspected of being wrong—then somebody must look after him.

Nick Nelson had had previous experiences of Barham's queerness, and invariably it had turned out that he was shielding or assisting somebody else. Anyway, it must be looked into by some one capable of looking into it. Drew was getting too queer.

And so, Nick Nelson went to the office of Lorimer Lane and enlisted the sympathies and then engaged the services of that clever and well known detective.

"Use your own judgment," Nelson told him, "about letting Mr. Barham know you are in the game. If you think best, be frank with him—but if it seems more advisable, then just let him think you're on the police side of the case."

"Are there two sides?" Lane asked. "I've only the newspaper accounts to guide me, you know."

"Not two opposing sides," Nelson told him, "but of course the police are trying to solve the mystery of Mrs. Barham's death and of Locke's disappearance, while Mr. Barham—lately, at any rate—is trying to hush up the whole affair. Now, the police are interested in his scarab business—that I've just told you about, and they think Mr. Barham is a thief. I know better—I know that he changed these things for some good and sufficient reason——"

"Can you suggest or imagine any good and sufficient reason?"

Lorimer Lane was not scoffing at Nelson's assumption, on the contrary, he was seriously interested.

Middle-aged, reserved and rather taciturn, he was glad to take hold of this strange case, and this new turn of Barham's regarding the scarabs was both astonishing and intriguing.

"No, I can't—" Nelson confessed, "that's why I have come to you. I know Andrew Barham as well as I know

any man on earth, and I know him to be incapable of dishonesty in any form. Yet, I know when he told me he exchanged those scarabs, he did exchange them. Now, I want you to find out why."

"On the face of it," Lane said, "it looks very much as if he were shielding somebody at his own expense—that is, if you are right in banking so securely on his honesty."

"Oh, I'm right in that," Nick returned.

"Very well, I'll take up the matter. Now, Mr. Nelson, tell me everything you know about it. Everything you can possibly think of that has any connection with it."

And Nick Nelson spent the better part of two hours, detailing all he knew, both from the police reports and from his personal knowledge of the Barhams and their friends and acquaintances.

Lane was especially interested in anything concerning Tommy Locke—perhaps because it was regarding that elusive gentleman that Nelson's information was the least definite.

"He seems a harmless sort," Nick said; "not at all the kind of man you think of as a murderer. A mediocre artist, a good pal, a quiet sort of person generally. His servant adores him, his friends all like him, and the little girl, who is supposed to be his sweetheart, is desperately in love with him."

"She'll be a mine of information, then," Lane observed. "I'm good at getting at the sweethearts."

"She's not so easy, though. For a young thing, and a demure, innocent looking person, she has a lot of reserve force of character that crops out unexpectedly. I don't know her personally, you understand, though I've seen her, but Detective Hutchins has told me a lot about her. Sometimes I believe he thinks she's mixed up in the actual crime, and then again, I feel sure he's only pretending to

do so, by way of urging Locke to put in an appearance to protect the girl."

"If Locke knows all that is going on, and doesn't come forward to look after his sweetheart, he's a poor sort of chap."

"I think he's in communication with her, somehow. But she's so uncommunicative, it's hard to tell."

"I'll find out where she stands," and Lane nodded his head in assurance. "The hardest proposition to tackle is Andrew Barham himself. From your description of him, I fancy he can hold his own against a detective's questioning."

"Yes, he can. But if he takes a notion to confide in you—and I don't see why he shouldn't——"

"What does he think of Locke?" Lane interrupted.

"He doesn't express any definite opinion. His one question is, how did his wife happen to go to Locke's studio. And, I must say we're no nearer finding that out than we were the night of the murder."

"The whole thing is so bizarre, the whole case so incredible that it ought to be easy," the detective said.

"Easy?"

"Yes; the more strange and unusual the circumstances, the easier it is, usually, to ferret out their meaning. Well, I'll go ahead in my own way, and I'll report to you, Mr. Nelson. As to my attitude toward Mr. Barham, I shall be guided by circumstances, and by developments as they appear. There'll be no trouble or rivalry between me and the police. I'll promise you that. I know Hutchins—and he'll be friendly with me."

And so Lorimer Lane took up the Barham case. He laid aside some other matters, in order to give it his

full attention, for to his mind it promised to be one of the most interesting problems he had ever tackled.

As a preliminary measure, he visited the studio apartment of Locke.

Glenn was still there on guard, and though he was interested in seeing the new detective he had little confidence that his powers were superior to those of Hutchins and his assistants.

"I'll just go over the place," and Lane nodded affably to Glenn and went off by himself.

He noted every bit of furniture and decoration in the studio with critical intentness, now and then making a brief note of something and again, merely nodding in satisfaction at finding something indicative.

On entering Locke's bedroom, he closed the door, and spent a long time in his examinations. The bathroom, too, claimed his absorbed attention, and when he found on the glass shelf above the washstand a small bottle of powdered pumice stone, he chuckled with satisfaction.

"*I am on the right track!*" he told himself. "Oh, what a case!"

Next he scanned the smoking-room—and studied carefully the spot where the victim had been found.

The police had forbidden any meddling there, and Lane noted carefully every sign he could find. There was little, however, that seemed to mean anything, but he viewed with interest the white line along the rug, which the police had concluded was powder from the vanity-case also discovered near by.

"But it isn't!" Lane said to himself. "Powder would be sprinkled grains—or else a soft, wide smear. This is a sharp, clean line—it's, well, I don't know what it is—but I have a pretty fair idea!"

On he went, poking into closets and cupboards, opening

drawers and looking behind doors, until he was absolutely familiar with everything in the place.

"Any light on the dark subject?" Glenn asked, as the detective reappeared.

"Not much so far—but a glimmer here and there. And I'm sure I have the right starting-point. Where's the Chinaman?"

"In the pantry. Want him?"

"I'll go there," and Lane appeared before Charley.

He wasted no time on unimportant questions, but said, abruptly, "When have you heard from Mr. Locke?"

"No more hear. He gone good-by," said the Chinaman.

"You are all paid up?"

"All and some more."

"All bills paid?"

"All."

"And on the first of the month you leave?"

"I leave."

"And Mr. Locke told you over the telephone that you would never see or hear from him again?"

"Yes, he tell so."

"All right, Charley, that's all."

Still with that satisfied expression on his face, Lorimer Lane started off to call on Miss Cutler.

He was by no means sure what course he should pursue with this somewhat remarkable young woman. From what he had heard of her, he didn't think she could be easily intimidated—perhaps it would be wisest to treat her as a confidante.

But he had great faith in his own intuitions and concluded he would be guided by them when they should meet.

Pearl Jane met him as one might receive a casual caller, and Lane concluded at once that he must step carefully if he would make good with this self-possessed young person.

She asked him to be seated, and then sat down herself, with a demurely expectant face.

"You want to question me?" she said.

"If you please," Lane returned courteously. "And, Miss Cutler, do not look on me as a prying inquisitor."

"Not at all—why should I?" she returned, her big violet eyes expressing the most innocent surprise.

Lane was disconcerted. He hated to acknowledge it to himself, but he was bothered by those eyes. Either the girl was absolutely in the dark concerning the mystery he was trying to solve, or she knew more than any one else. He was not sure which.

He resolved on a bold stroke.

"Miss Cutler," he said, bending forward and speaking in a low tone, "do you know Mr. Locke's secret?"

At least he had got under her guard.

"His secret!" she exclaimed. "I didn't know he had one! Oh, you mean do I know where he is?"

"No; I don't mean that at all. I mean do you know what he is—who he is?"

"I know Mr. Locke for a good friend, an artist, and an honorable gentleman. If you mean do I know his family or his antecedents—I do not. There was a man who claimed to be his brother—but I believe the police discredited his story."

She was again in command of herself—but Lane was sure that his sudden question had disturbed her. He was sure that she did know that Locke had a secret—a big one—and he was equally sure that she was as ignorant of what it was as he was himself—perhaps more so.

He concluded that the way to manage her was by sudden surprising questions or statements, and he watched her closely as he said: "You call him an honorable man, and yet you suspect him of the murder of Mrs. Barham!"

The shot told. Pearl Jane went white, and her hands clenched as she struggled to preserve her composure.

She thought quickly but steadily. Her brain was clear, though her nerves were jumping. But she had one fixed principle to follow. Tommy had told her to tell the truth. He had emphasized that. So she did.

She parried only a moment. "Is that a statement or a question?" she said.

Lane stared at her. She certainly was surprising.

"I'll make it a question," he said; "do you think Mr. Locke killed Mrs. Barham?"

"It's hard to answer," she said, with a thoughtful look. "I can't think it—and yet—yes, I do suspect him."

"And you still deem him an honorable man?"

"Yes, I do."

"Do honorable men commit murder?"

"That question I can't answer. I dare say they have done so."

"Well, Miss Cutler, this talk gets us nowhere. Now, for facts. What makes you suspect Mr. Locke?"

"Only because I saw him go downstairs and out of his front door. Then, when I immediately afterward went up the back stairs, I saw the body of Mrs. Barham there on the floor."

"And so you concluded Mr. Locke had killed her?"

"I don't say I concluded that. I say I suspected it."

"Why should he kill her?"

"I haven't the slightest idea."

"You're sure you didn't kill her yourself?"

Pearl Jane allowed herself the slightest glimmer of a smile, as she replied: "I'm positive of that."

"Well you ought to know. And you still love and respect Mr. Locke, even if he is a murderer?"

"Oh, he isn't that."

"You contradict yourself——"

"I don't care if I do. I tell the truth. The truth may be contradictory. You see—circumstances make me suspect Mr. Locke with my mind—but——"

"But your heart tells you he's innocent!"

"Yes—exactly that!" and the girl's smile was like a heavenly illumination. It transformed her from merely a pretty child into a woman of exquisite beauty and charm.

Lorimer Lane stared at her.

"I've never seen any one quite like you, Miss Cutler," he said, slowly. "Permit me to offer you my sincere admiration and appreciation."

And now Pearl Jane stared at him. Her smile faded, she looked haughty and resentful.

But as she realized that Lane was really sincere, she smiled at him and with him, and in that moment their friendship was sealed.

"Remember," he said, "I told you at the start, that I want to be friendly. Now, if you will help me, and if you will continue to be truthful, I've an idea that we can clear your Mr. Locke from the suspicion of murder, whatever other crime he may be guilty of."

"Of course," she said, assuredly, "and he isn't guilty of any crime."

"Not crime, perhaps—but——"

Lane hesitated, but his scrutiny of the young face gave no answering appreciation of the thought he had in mind, and he concluded she did not share his suspicions.

He went away, well satisfied with the interview, and especially well satisfied with Pearl Jane.

"She's a hummer!" he said to himself, "and I hope to goodness I can get her Tommy back for her. If he's all I think him, they will some day be a happy couple!"

And Lorimer Lane might have felt his opinion verified if he could have heard a conversation that ensued soon after his departure.

It was over the telephone, and Pearl Jane held the receiver at one end.

At the other end was a man, who said a joyful "Yes!" in response to her query, "Is that you, Tommy?"

"Can we have a long talk?" Pearl Jane asked.

"No, dear, I can only say a few words to you. Things are happening and I don't know what the future holds. Tell me this, my little girl—can you keep faith and trust in me whatever happens?"

"Yes, Tommy, whatever happens."

"But what happens may surprise you beyond all bounds."

"My faith and trust are beyond all bounds."

"Bless you, dear heart. Yet what you learn may cause you to despise me——"

"No—not that. If you love me—if you want me—I am your Pearl Jane forever—whether we ever meet again or not."

"All right, sweetheart, then, remember this. When you hear—as you may, the most astonishing news—remember that I love you, I—I love you!"

"Why do you emphasize the *I*? There is no one in the world for me, but the man you call I. My Tommy—my own Tommy Locke."

"Yes—Pearl Jane—your own Tommy Locke. Good-by, sweetheart, I daren't stay longer. Trust me through all mysteries, and some day we can be happy together."

"Really, Tommy?"

"Really, dear. Good-by."

Pearl Jane was bewildered, but happy. Tommy was inexplicable, but she knew—she *knew* he was no murderer,

or criminal of any sort. He was her Tommy, and some day they would be happy together. He had said so, and that was enough for Pearl Jane.

It was the next day before Lane obtained an interview with Andrew Barham.

He had waited on that gentleman's convenience, and when he was finally admitted to his presence the detective looked covertly at the man whose acquaintance he was about to make.

"You wished to see me?" Barham said, courteously. "On what errand?"

And suddenly, Lane made up his mind.

"Regarding the mystery of your wife's death," he said, frankly. "I wish to take up the case, and solve it, if possible. I should be glad to know your attitude toward me—or toward my work."

"Mr. Lane," and Barham looked very grave, "I suppose it is right and just that the mystery of my wife's death should be solved. But—I want to say, that I, personally, would greatly prefer to have the whole matter dropped. I should prefer never to know the truth of the case, rather than have certain painful revelations made, that must be made if the whole story comes out."

"You refer, Mr. Barham, to your wife's unfortunate losses at Bridge?"

"And her consequent wrong-doing in connection therewith," said Andrew Barham, looking at Lane unflinchingly; "and not only that phase of the matter, but other equally distressing circumstances. These things would redound to the grief and pain of my wife's mother, an elderly lady, and also to the disparagement, even disgrace of my wife's memory. I hold that the only good done by a solution of the mystery of her death would be

the punishment of the murderer. While we all feel that such a crime should be avenged, I, myself, would rather never know the truth, than to expose all."

"I understand and appreciate, Mr. Barham, your attitude, but I cannot look at it as you do. Moreover, the police are not willing to look at it in that light, either. Now, I must tell you, that I propose to go on with my investigations, and I will say right now, if you have any confession to make, or explanations to give, I should be glad to hear them. I am not antagonistic: on the contrary, I want to meet your wishes in so far as I can, but——"

"Mr. Lane—I may as well say that I know who sent you here. I know whose doing it is that you have taken up this case. It is at the request of my dear friend, Mr. Nelson. He is doing it out of the best of motives—he thinks I am sacrificing myself for some one else."

"And aren't you?"

Andrew Barham smiled.

"Not exactly," he said. "And yet," he looked very grave, "if you delve too deeply into this matter, if you try too hard to discover the murderer of my wife—it will make——"

He stopped abruptly, and seemed to draw back into himself as into a shell.

"I would rather say no more, Mr. Lane. If you want to question me I am quite prepared to answer."

"Then, Mr. Barham, did you or did you not exchange the scarab that Mr. Hutchins showed you for another and less valuable one?"

"I did, Mr. Lane."

"Will you tell me why you did that?"

"Because the valuable scarab was my own property, and I desired to have it again in my possession."

"It was stolen from you, then?"

"No, not stolen—it was taken by some one who meant well."

"It was taken," Lane looked at Barham, steadily, "by Miss Cutler from the hand of your dead wife?"

"Yes," said Andrew Barham.

CHAPTER XVII

THE TRUTH ABOUT LOCKE

"WELL, Mr. Nelson, I've solved part of the mystery, at any rate," said Lorimer Lane, as he went to make his first formal report to Nick Nelson. "I'm afraid you'll be sorry rather than otherwise, but the disclosure was bound to come."

"I may be sorry I called you in at all," Nelson responded, gloomily. "My friend Mr. Barham is not pleased at my bringing you into the matter."

"I knew it, and I am not surprised. You see, his secret was safe, until my advent. Without undue conceit, I may say I feel sure the police would never have discovered it."

"Well, what is it?"

"It's simply this. The missing artist Thomas Locke can never be found—for the simple reason that there is no such person."

Nelson stared at the detective.

"Explain, please," he said briefly.

"I will. The artist, Locke, and your friend, Mr. Andrew Barham, are one and the same person."

"Oh, now, Mr. Lane, that's a little too much. I can't take it in."

"Take it slowly. I shouldn't make the statement unless I knew it to be true. If you will think it over as I detail my arguments, I am sure you'll be convinced."

"Go ahead."

"To begin with, it would be practically impossible for a man to disappear so utterly off the face of the earth,

as Locke seems to have done. With a large reward offered for his apprehension, no man could hide his personality so long and so cleverly and escape all discovery or detection. But, aside from that, I have proved my case to my own satisfaction, as I am sure I can prove it to yours."

"I'm trying to grasp it. But, before anything else, why would Andrew Barham cut up any such trick as that? Why?"

"I will tell you. I may as well tell you that first. I have studied Mr. Barham for three days now—I have inquired among his friends and acquaintances—in a roundabout way—I have interviewed his servants and I have even talked with his mother-in-law. A most surprisingly unpleasant old lady."

"And you learned?"

"I learned that for some reason, Andrew Barham chose to lead a double life. He was part of the time a resident of Fifth Avenue and a society man. Also, part of the time, he was Thomas Locke, artist, of Washington Square."

"Have you taxed him with this?"

"I have not. I am employed by you—so I come to you with my findings. If you say so, my discovery shall go no further."

"I don't know what to say—I am too amazed for words. If any lesser detective than yourself told me this thing I should scoff at it. But I know your reputation, I know your prowess, and I feel I must believe you—at least I must believe that you believe this thing yourself."

"I know it. As to the more positive bits of evidence, let me call to your mind the wig, left behind in the midnight scramble with the policeman. Mr. Barham, of course, pursued his career as Locke, in disguise. He couldn't have managed it any other way. His disguise

was not elaborate but it was effective. It consisted only of the well-made and perfectly fitting wig of long black hair, the large and heavy-rimmed glasses and two gold caps for his eye teeth. With these he was sufficiently changed in appearance for his purpose."

"Those things couldn't really disguise him."

"Not from you or from any one who knew him. But he didn't need that. All he wanted was a different personality for the artist that should in no way resemble the real Andrew Barham. He never expected to meet the same people in his two separate walks of life. And so, he went his way in his Fifth Avenue surroundings, and occasionally, when he chose, he went away, down to Washington Square for a day or two. His frequent absences from the studio, and also, from his Barham home, are thus explained."

"I can't take it in. Did his wife know of this?"

"Most certainly not. No one knew it. But, to my mind, it was a suspicion of it that made Mrs. Barham go down there that night to find out."

"Mr. Lane, I don't believe a word of all this! I can't believe it! You are carried away with it all as a theory, and you are trying to make things prove up. But it's too preposterous—too incredible——"

"Wait a minute, Mr. Nelson, how about this? In Mr. Barham's desk drawer, the one at his right hand, as he usually sits, I found concealed under some papers, the small picture of Miss Cutler that disappeared from the studio that night of the reappearance of Locke."

And then Nick Nelson remembered how Barham had continually fumbled in that drawer on certain occasions when Nelson had been there. Was the man in love with Pearl Jane? Was he really Locke? Nelson's brain seemed to spin around.

"This won't do," he said after a moment. "I can't take the responsibility of your disclosures. Come with me at once to Andrew Barham. We will lay all our cards on the table. If he has done this thing—he will tell me so. I know Barham."

And so the detective and the man who had employed him went together to Barham's office.

He received them gravely, seeming to know their errand.

He took them to his private office, and at once opened the subject himself.

"My secret is a secret no longer," he said, and looked at Nelson with a strange, almost wistful smile.

"Tell me it isn't so, Drew," Nelson cried; "tell me you never did such a thing!"

"As what?"

"As to pretend to be Locke—and all that!"

"Is it so terrible?" Barham looked thoughtful. "Yes, I am Locke, as I see Mr. Lane has already discovered. Do you want to hear the story, Nick?"

"Indeed I do."

"It isn't a unique one, I daresay." Barham still had that far-away look in his eyes and an absorbed expression on his face.

But he told his story with dignity and with a fine faith in Nelson's ability and willingness to understand.

"You know, Nick, that Maddy and I were never congenial in our tastes or in our selection of companions. I couldn't bear that crowd that she enjoyed so much, and she never liked the quieter people I preferred.

"I honestly tried to adapt my preferences to hers, and to bring about a state of affairs whereby we could be more congenial, but she wouldn't make any concessions. I'm not blaming her, you understand, but—well, I suppose the

main trouble was that I couldn't play Bridge—that is, not as her cronies played it. Nor did I want to. I have none of the gambling instinct, none of the craving for that sort of excitement. Maddy had.

“The result was, we drifted more and more apart. I used to take her to the card parties and go for her when they were over—but they kept up so late, and it irked her to have me waiting for her—well, never mind all that. I became bored and restless because almost every night I was left alone to amuse myself—or, to enjoy the company of Mrs. Selden. I went to the clubs a lot, of course, but they didn't give me what I wanted. I longed for an interest in life, a few congenial spirits, and most of all I wanted to follow up a taste for painting that I had as a younger man.

“I tried it at home, but Maddy objected to the smell of paint in the house, so I concluded to set up a studio. I had no thought, at first, of what came about afterward—but one night I went to a masquerade with Madeleine. I wore that long haired wig, which so became me and looked so natural on me—that after a while some such idea as I finally carried out began to take shape in my brain. I mulled over it a year before I decided to try it, and then—after a desperate attempt to persuade Maddy to give me at least part of her time, and failing, I set up my studio.

“The disguise and the double life were partly to be free from intrusion and interruption—to have a sort of haven and sanctuary all to myself—and partly, out of a spirit of bravado. If Maddy could lead her life—I could lead mine, I argued. I wasn't so very keen about keeping it secret—indeed, if my wife had discovered it I was in no way ashamed of it.

“But, as time went on, I found I was changing. I was becoming more and more Tommy Locke and less

and less Andrew Barham. I began to realize that I had gone farther than I intended—that I had burned bridges behind me that I never could rebuild. Time and again I tried to give up that other life—tried to resolve to close up the studio and never go back to it. I kept things arranged that way—there was always money enough in Charley's possession to pay all bills and settle up all claims, if I could conclude to give up the other life I led.

"But I couldn't do it. Always I would drift back there again."

"But how, Drew, how could you work it? Why were you never discovered—or suspected?"

"It was easy," Barham said. "I had so many out of town engagements in connection with my business that no one at home was surprised at my absence for several days at a time. And, at the other end, no one ever thought of questioning my goings or comings. It was really all very innocent and decent. I had good friends—no intimates, and no——"

"You are sure you want me to hear all this revelation, Mr. Barham?" Lane asked, noting the confidences that were evidently meant for Nelson.

"It doesn't matter, Mr. Lane. Yes—I think I'd rather you understood the whole situation. That's about all, anyway. The disguise became second nature to me. I could achieve it in a moment or two. Many a time I have left the house in Fifth Avenue, ostensibly for a trip to Chicago or St. Louis. In my bag I had my wig, glasses, collar and tie, and a few such things. I would take a taxi from the station, whither my own chauffeur had driven me, and in it I would make the change in my appearance. The taxi driver rarely noticed it—if he did a five dollar bill closed his mouth. I would get out a few blocks from the studio and walk to it. I cannot tell you how I enjoyed

the rest and freedom from my distressing home life—yes, I may as well admit it was distressing. Madeleine grew continually harder to live with, and Mrs. Selden was always a thorn in my flesh. I would not make these disclosures, Nick, but I must make you understand.”

“I do understand, Andrew, and I want you to know it!”

Nelson impulsively reached over and grasped his friend’s hand.

Lorimer Lane, too, showed appreciation and understanding, but he was eagerly awaiting the rest of the story. His leaping mind had already jumped to the last chapter.

“But,” Barham resumed, “there never was a truer word than Oscar Wilde wrote in his ‘Ballad of Reading Gaol.’

“For he who lives more lives than one,
More deaths than one must die.

“I have proved that over and over again. I have lived a double life, it is true, and I have paid for it by dying a thousand deaths in my conscience. I have suffered remorse untold—I have so loathed myself at times that I would willingly have died in earnest to get out of it all. And then—the urge would be so strong, the desire for that little home, those few good friends—that I would go back there in spite of myself.”

“And I don’t blame you!” cried Nelson. “It was no crime, Drew. Many a man lives a double life of far more ignominy and shame.”

“There was no ignominy, no shame,” said Barham, gravely, “but it was deceit—and I am not naturally a deceitful man. I could look at it all calmly and dispassionately while I was down at the studio, but when I was

at home, at my own table, with those two unsuspecting women, I felt the veriest scoundrel on the face of the earth."

"Well you're not!" and Nelson again grasped the hand of his friend.

"I agree to that," said Lane, looking earnestly at Barham. "But now—will you tell us all you know about the night of the masquerade?"

Barham looked up quickly.

"You think I killed my wife, Mr. Lane. I don't blame you—or, rather, I mean, I can't wonder at it. When the police know this story and I suppose they must, I shall be suspected—probably accused—possibly convicted. That I must bear—for 'he who lives more lives than one, more deaths than one must die.' But—I didn't kill my wife."

"Thank God!" and Nelson's fervent expression told how eagerly he had been waiting for this declaration. He believed Barham implicitly; as he believed the whole story he had just heard, so he believed the statement of Barham's innocence regarding the murder of Madeleine.

"Now the thing is to find the criminal," Nick exclaimed, his whole face almost radiant with his relief.

But Lane was not so sure of Barham's integrity.

"Tell us about the party," he said, his eyes fixed on Barham's face.

"I will," and Barham sensed the doubt in the detective's mind. "I had no wish to have it but some friends urged me to, and though I never had given a large party before, I consented, on condition that they should do all the planning and ordering. To this they consented and even sent out the invitations. I didn't go down until the night of the ball."

"Will you detail your movements that evening?" Lane asked him.

"Certainly. I was at home for dinner. Afterward, I went to the Club—you remember, Nick, I talked with you a few moments. After that I merely left the Club, walked a block or two, took a taxi, made the necessary changes in my appearance while in the taxi. That is, I did so in part. As I reached the studio before any guests arrived, I could fix myself up at my leisure."

"One moment, Mr. Barham. Was part of your disguise a change in your especially white teeth?"

"Yes;" and Barham looked surprised at the question. "I had a small vial of a brown colored preparation. A swallow of that and my teeth were stained rather darker than they really are. I confess I became a bit of an expert at it."

"And you used pumice stone to remove that brown stain. It was the pumice stone in your studio bathroom that helped me to my conclusions."

"Right," and Barham smiled a little ruefully. "I was not very clever, was I? But, as I told you, I really had no very great fear of discovery. I mean, if, or when I was discovered, I was ready to admit it all. However, to resume. By the time the guests arrived, I was completely my other self, and arrayed in my monk's robe. Then the party began."

Barham paused, as if unable to go on with his recital.

But Lane was waiting, eager and anxious for the rest.

"I didn't enjoy the party much," Barham said; "I care little for dancing and the whole thing bored me."

"And then your wife came," Lane said, pointedly.

Andrew Barham looked the detective straight in the eye.

"I didn't see my wife arrive," he said. "I didn't know she was there. I came away before the alarm of her death was raised—and I had no idea that she was in that house."

"Why did you leave so suddenly and so unceremoniously?"

"That I shall not tell you—but it was in no way connected with my wife's presence on the scene—of which I state, on my word of honor, I was entirely unaware."

Lorimer Lane looked disappointed. And he was. Not that he, now, really suspected Andrew Barham guilty of his wife's death, but so far he had believed in his veracity, and now he doubted it. There could be no reason, he argued, that would make Barham leave as he did leave, except the knowledge of his wife's presence at the ball, either alive or dead.

"You say you left before the alarm of Mrs. Barham's death was raised; but she was already dead when you ran out of the front door."

"I didn't run out."

"No; on the contrary, you walked out casually, saying you would be back in a few moments."

"I did."

"Why did you go?"

"I cannot tell you."

"You mean you will not?"

"I mean I will not."

"Oh, Drew, for Heaven's sake, tell us," Nelson cried, in genuine distress. "You've been so frank and honest till now, do tell me the truth. Why did you go—if you didn't know Madeleine was there?"

"I can't tell you, Nick. Mr. Lane, I refuse to tell. You asked for my story, you have heard it. Now, it is up to you to make what use of it you see fit."

Andrew Barham folded his arms and sat back in his chair, as one who has played his part.

But Lane pursued his inquiries.

"Now, how about the scarab, Mr. Barham?"

"Oh, yes, the scarab. It is my own—and is, as Charley called it, a 'lucky piece.' I have had it for years, and I am a bit superstitious about it. Foolishly, I took it down to the studio and left it there. It was, I think, on the table in the den, and—I am only surmising now—but I fancy my wife saw it and recognized it as mine. She had it in her hand when she died—that is certain. Miss Cutler, thinking I cherished it, took it and saved it for me. My Chinaman saw this. Well, never mind all that—when Detective Hutchins showed it to me, I knew at once that the Museum people would recognize it as mine. It is a famous specimen. So I substituted another for it—both being my own property."

"Yes—I see," and Lane pondered a few moments. "Now, Mr. Barham, in view of your frank disclosures, I must ask you if you want me to continue my investigation of the case.

"I do not."

"Do you, Mr. Nelson?"

"I want whatever Mr. Barham wants. He is my friend, and I agree to any decision he may make."

"Can you tell me, Mr. Barham," Lane went on, thoughtfully, "why your wife went down there that evening?"

"No; I cannot. That is what puzzles me. I should think it might be possible that she had seen or heard something that made her suspect the truth about me, and that she went down to see for herself. But I cannot think that; first, because I can see no possible way in which her suspicions could have been aroused, and also,

because her whole attitude toward me of late had been kinder and more pleasant than usual."

"Yet it might have been that she suspected your deception," Lane said.

"Yes, it might be," Barham agreed. "I've thought over that a great deal, but I can come to no conclusion."

"And that night, Mr. Barham, when you left the studio party you came directly home?"

"I did. I took a bus on Fifth Avenue which came up to my own door. I rode a few blocks past, and walked back. I let myself in with my latchkey, and went at once to my room and to bed."

"You refuse to tell why you left the party?"

"I refuse."

"Very well, go on."

"I had been in bed less than an hour, when my man called me to the telephone, and I heard the astounding news that my wife was dead—or, as they put it, fatally injured—in my own studio! I was absolutely stunned with amazement. Understand, I had no idea she was there when I left the place."

"Mr. Barham, that is the one point of your story that I can't believe!"

"I believe it!" Nelson cried. "I know it is true if you say so, Drew. Go on."

"That's all there is to tell. I went down there at the summons of the police, and I found my wife there—dead. I cannot tell you of my surprise and horror—and bewilderment. Nor do I yet understand why she was there."

"And after all that—Mr. Barham, you returned to the studio in your disguise?"

"I went down first in my rightful name. I went with Mr. Nelson, in hopes I might find my scarab, which I greatly prized, and which I knew would be recognized as

mine if found. But I couldn't find it—so I secretly left a note for Charley asking him to search for it."

"But you went down again—in your Locke disguise, and had a set to with the man Glenn—and lost your wig!"

Andrew Barham couldn't repress a slight smile at the recollection and only replied, "Yes, I did."

"What did you go for?"

"I don't care to tell you."

"Then I'll tell you. You went for the picture of Miss Cutler. You secured it, and brought it home with you, and it is now in your desk drawer at home."

Andrew Barham looked a little surprised, but he said, "Since you know that, I will tell you that I did do so. I will tell you, too, that I do care for Miss Cutler, and I hope some day in the future to tell her so in person. But I want to say that not only did I never hint this to her during the life of my wife, but I did not realize it myself. It is only since my series of troubles began, that I have learned the state of my own heart, and I will say to you two men in confidence, that I do love Pearl Jane Cutler, but I will ask you to respect my secret, for the present, at least."

Andrew Barham was so quietly dignified, so truly frank, that the two men who listened felt a renewed respect for him, and Lane hastily revised certain of his decisions.

Nick Nelson merely grasped once again the hand of his friend, and there was no need of words between them.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE WHOLE TRUTH

BUT while this was all satisfactory to the friends of Andrew Barham it was not so easily accepted by the police.

Hutchins and Dickson both listened to the whole story as detailed by Lorimer Lane to them.

"Are you sure about this thing?" Dickson asked. "I had sort of a notion that Locke was a masquerader, but I couldn't make the facts fit it. Why, the two men are directly opposite in character—I mean Barham and the artist."

"No, they're not," Lane contradicted. "That's what I noticed first. They have much in common. The appointments of Locke's bathroom, the fine towels, the expensive soaps and all that, first struck me as being out of keeping with a poor artist, and hinted at a cultured gentleman. The furniture of the place is not elaborate, but all the little personal belongings betoken a luxury-loving nature. Oh, well, the man himself told me the whole story—we can't very well doubt it."

"No, of course not," Dickson agreed, "but it's a pretty big yarn to swallow. And, moreover, that settles the question of the murder. Of course it was Barham who killed his wife. She went down there to spy on him and he killed her and ran away. Too easy. All for the love of the little Cutler girl, of course."

"I don't think Barham killed his wife," Lane demurred. "He isn't the sort to do that. And, too, he said himself

he didn't realize that he cared for the little girl until after his wife was dead."

"And you fell for that! No, Mr. Lane, his affection for the young lady dates farther back. I can see the whole situation, and I haven't the least doubt that Mrs. Barham discovered—or, at least suspected her husband's double life and went to the masquerade ball in order to see for herself. That's why she told no one where she was going. That's why she told her chauffeur to take her there that night, meaning to go on to the Gardner party afterward. Then Barham, finding her there—of course he would know her in any costume—had a quarrel with her, and either with intent to kill her, or merely in a fit of blind rage, he flung the bronze at her and she fell. Immediately, Barham went down the front stairs, gave his monk's robe to his servant, told the doorman he would be back shortly, and disappeared. Could there be a better way out of it all? He went back at once to his home, and, returning to his life as Andrew Barham, was free from all suspicion of his crime. I for one don't want any clearer case against him."

"I don't believe it," Lane mused; "I can't believe it. He was so convincing as he told his story——"

"Of course he was. He's a clever man and a shrewd one. But he can't convince me. I want some one else to hang this crime on, before I give up my hope of hanging it on him. He's the logical criminal, he's the obvious one—in a word, there's no other way to look."

"No"; Lane insisted. "You're wrong and I know you're wrong—and I'll prove you're wrong. Give me a couple of days—give me twenty-four hours before you arrest Andrew Barham, and I'll give you another suspect—and the right one, or I'll eat my own words."

The police agreed to this, saying they should, however, keep a close watch on Barham's movements.

As a matter of fact, Andrew Barham was at that moment making up his mind about a very important matter.

He had divulged his secret to the detective, Lane, who had, Barham was sure, gone straight to the police with it. Also, he had told Nick Nelson, his best friend, the whole truth. There was another still who deserved to hear the truth, and to her Barham was going to tell it.

He was a little uncertain how Pearl Jane would take the story. He had deceived her, he couldn't deny that. Would she forgive him and be friends—or, would she resent it all too much?"

At any rate, he must find out. Barham was not the sort who fears to put it to the touch to win or lose it all.

And, he concluded to himself, if she scorns me, and refuses ever to see me again—well, that's one more death to die.

So, from his own house, and on his own telephone, he called up Pearl Jane.

"Tommy!" she exclaimed, delightedly.

"Yes, dear—Tommy. Now, I am coming to see you—and I—well I don't know just how to say what I have to say. But, Mr. Barham will come to see you first."

"Mr. Barham!"

"Yes, Mr. Andrew Barham. When he comes—see him—will you, Pearl Jane?"

"Why, of course—but what can he want to see me about?"

"You'll find out when he comes. Just receive him—and, be alone, will you?"

"Yes, of course I'll do whatever you say, Tommy."

And in less than half an hour, Pearl Jane was informed of Mr. Barham's arrival.

"Send him up," she said—and sat, wondering.

And then Andrew Barham went up to Pearl Jane's little sitting room.

She had never seen him before—to her knowledge.

But as soon as she did see him, she divined the truth at once.

"You—you are Tommy!" she said, looking at his blond hair, and gazing straight into his eyes, unhindered now by the large disfiguring glasses.

"Yes, dear—sit down and listen to my story."

And then in his own simple, straightforward way, Andrew Barham told the girl the history of his double life—the reasons for it—and the closing of it by the tragedy that had come into it.

"Can you ever forgive me?" he asked, looking deep into her wondering eyes.

"I? I have nothing to forgive! You committed no crime against me."

"I committed no crime at all, dear. I did not kill my wife."

"But you know who did?"

"I have a suspicion, Pearl Jane, a grave suspicion. I think I do know who killed her. But I cannot tell of it. I cannot bring myself to cast suspicion on one who may, after all, be as innocent as I am myself. First, though, I want to make my peace with you. You don't resent, then, my deception of you—of you all? It was such a comfort to me to live the studio life—to have the studio friends—oh, little girl, you can never know how awful my home life was!"

"Why, dear? How?"

The gentle sympathy brought it all out in a rush of

words. Barham had never expected to divulge his secret woes, but this girl's attitude was so confidential, so receptive, he couldn't help it.

"My wife was utterly uncongenial to me," he said, "this is no disparagement to her—she was a fine woman—but her tastes were all for society, and especially, Bridge playing society. I hate card playing, and so we had nothing in common. She knew and admitted this, and we drifted farther and farther apart. Too, I wanted to paint—I know I'm not an artist, but I love it so. My wife objected to my painting at home, so I set up a studio down here. I had no intention, at first, of keeping it secret, but it seemed better to do so, if I would be let alone, so I carried out the plan.

"And, as is my habit with anything I undertake, I carried it out thoroughly. I used every precaution that no one should suspect that Thomas Locke was Andrew Barham. And it was not at all difficult. I soon had the whole matter so well adjusted and the double life so perfectly arranged, that no one ever suspected such a thing. Nor do I feel myself under any obligation to apologize for it, or even explain it to any one except you."

"Why to me?" and Pearl Jane looked at him with a wistful little smile.

"Because, dear—because I love you. It sounds strange for a man to say that, so soon after his wife's death. But I am truthful, Pearl, and I tell you honestly, I didn't know that I loved you until after Madeleine was gone from me. I had never analyzed or realized my feelings toward you. I think, had my wife lived, I never should have done so. I felt friendly toward you, but I had never thought of loving you. But that night at the party you touched my hand—and a thrill went all through

me—and I wondered at it. However, had Madeleine lived, and had I thought I was growing fond of you, I should have given up the studio, and put you out of my life. I owed her that. But now she is dead, and while convention should make me keep silent, for a time at least, I waive convention and I tell you that I love you. Not as Tommy Locke, but as Andrew Barham, I love you, and after a time, I want to make you my wife. What is your answer, Pearl—little Pearl?”

“There can be but one answer,” she returned, tears in her lovely eyes. “I love you, *you*, whoever you are, or whatever your name is. I am so overcome at what you have told me—I am so bewildered—I can’t seem to think it all out yet. But one thing I know—I love you and I’m glad—*glad* you love me.”

And then she was in his arms, sobbing out all her bewilderment and surprise on his breast.

“Darling,” he said, “I do love you with all my heart and soul. And the time will come—some day, when I shall proudly claim you for my wife, and gladly take you into my heart and home openly. But for the present—for your sake as well as my own, we must keep our love a secret.”

“Of course—it is the only thing to do. And—and maybe you will change your mind——”

“Don’t, darling, don’t say such things. You are the love of my life. I never cared for Madeleine as I love you—you dear, sweet little thing! She was a lovely woman and a beautiful one. You are my little companion, my beloved child—my other self. We shall be happy together, both after we are married, and also before. We can be friends at once, and we can be more and more to each other as time goes on. I am yours now and forever, and though convention seems to make

it wiser for us to stay apart for a time, yet if you say so—we will go away at once—together, forever.”

“No, no, dear, I don’t want that. I know how the world will look at us, and I know it’s best and wisest to keep our secret for a time. I can’t get used to it myself! Tommy—I think I shall always call you Tommy—you did wear a wig, didn’t you? But, as you assured me, you are not bald!”

And they laughed together at the idea.

“Also, I miss your gold teeth,” Pearl Jane went on. “That was a clever dodge.”

“Yes—I felt I must make myself into two men, as widely differentiated as possible. So the gold caps and the big glasses and the wig seemed enough, and they were enough to allay any and all suspicion.

“Though there never was any chance for suspicion. Nobody ever dreamed of the identity of the two men.”

“And did your wife suspect it? Was that why she came to the studio?”

“I think that must be the truth. At first, I couldn’t believe it, but I think now there is no other explanation. Had she made herself known to me while there, or had she taxed me with the whole thing at any time, I was quite ready to own up and confess the whole business. I was ready and willing to tell her the truth; that I couldn’t be happy at home, that I wanted a studio and a studio life, and that I had as much right to it as she had to her Bridge-playing career. The only difference was that I led my chosen life secretly, and she did not. But that was because I wanted to be left to myself and not bothered by the friends and acquaintances of our social life. Had my wife known of my studio, she would have been everlastingly coming down there and bringing her friends. That was the atmosphere I wanted to get

away from. Well, there's the story, Pearl, dear. And now that you know it, and forgive me, I don't care for the opinion or criticism of anybody else."

"And about the murder?"

"Yes—about that. As I told you I have a suspicion—a strong one, that I know who did it. But I shall not mention any name, unless I have to——"

"To clear yourself."

"Yes—and for you. I had partly thought I would let myself be suspected, rather than accuse another. But, now that I have you to consider, I can't let myself be wrongly accused. I must keep my name fair against the time when I can give it to you. Pearl Barham—I think we'll leave out the Jane. I never liked that part of it."

"Call me whatever you like—Tommy," and little Pearl gave Barham a glance of absolute adoration and love.

"Dear heart," he said, and taking her into his embrace he covered her sweet face with kisses.

But the future of Andrew Barham was still beset with difficulties.

Hutchins came to him, and told him the attitude of the police. The detective admitted that Lorimer Lane did not think Barham guilty of the murder of his wife, but that unless he could produce some other suspect, the police must soon arrest him.

"Then, I shall have to tell of my own suspicion," Barham said gravely. "I hoped not to do so—I hoped the case could go out of existence as one of those unsolved mysteries. But, if it must be—it must, and, much as I dislike to do so, I will tell of my suspicions and you can investigate them."

But before Hutchins left, Lane came in and declared that he had himself discovered another way to look, and

he wished Barham's sanction of his work in that direction.

"It is a woman," Lane said, and at once he saw, from the expression on Andrew Barham's face, he had hit it right—so far.

"I deduced much from that pair of long, white gloves," Lane went on. "They are of a make superior to those worn by most of the ladies at that party. They are Paris gloves, and they are small and dainty. I feel sure none of the other guests had gloves like that. I mean they betoken the presence there of one of Mrs. Barham's friends—one of her own circle of society. I have again interviewed Claudine, and I find that Mrs. Sayre, the lady who visited Mrs. Barham that evening was being—well, the word must be used—was being blackmailed by Mrs. Barham at that time. I have traced Mrs. Sayre's movements that evening, and both her maid and her husband say that she went on an errand to her dressmaker's early that evening and afterwards returned home, and went later with Mr. Sayre to the party at Mrs. Gardner's. I have checked up this story, and I find she did not go to her dressmaker's at all that evening. Her story was that she would go to her dressmaker's wearing a masquerade costume that she wished to have remodeled. I hold that she wore this costume in order to gain admittance to the masquerade at the studio of Thomas Locke, and that Mrs. Barham had already told her of his masquerade, and that she, Mrs. Barham, expected to be there.

"I don't believe that Mrs. Sayre went to the studio party with any intention of killing Mrs. Barham, but I believe she went there expecting an exposé of Mr. Barham's double life. I believe Mrs. Barham had suspicions of this, and had told Mrs. Sayre of them. Now, Mr. Barham, is she the one you have had in mind in connection with this matter?"

"Yes," said Barham, "she is."

"Will you go with me to interview her?"

But this Andrew Barham couldn't bring himself to do. He begged to be let off from such an unpleasant undertaking, and the two detectives went away without him.

Reaching the Sayre house, they succeeded in obtaining an interview with the lady.

"I don't know what you can have to talk to me about," she said, a little nervously as she appeared in her living room and greeted the two men.

"Perhaps nothing of importance, Mrs. Sayre," Lane said, "and perhaps it is. Will you detail your movements the night of the studio party in Washington Square—when Mrs. Barham was killed."

Whereupon Mrs. Sayre glibly told of her visit to her dressmaker, and afterward the party at Mrs. Gardner's.

"All very well," Lane said, "but your dressmaker says you were not there at all."

Rosamond Sayre turned white, but she declared the woman had forgotten her visit, or for some reason of her own preferred to tell a falsehood about it.

"No, Mrs. Sayre, she is not telling an untruth, but you are. You did not go to your dressmaker's that night, you went to the studio party. You wore the costume of 'Winter', and you left the house just a few moments after Mr. Locke did. You were seen by a neighbor. And before you went—just before, you had a discussion with Mrs. Barham regarding——"

"I did! She blackmailed me! She had made my life a burden for weeks! She knew a secret which I would rather have died than let it come to the ears of my husband. She knew a secret that would have ruined me if it had become known. And she had already extorted hundreds of dollars from me which I paid her to keep silent about it.

She was continuing to demand money—she told me that night at the studio—we were alone in the den—that unless I paid her a thousand dollars she would tell it that very night at Mrs. Gardner's. I didn't mean to kill her—but I was so angry at her cruelty and hard-heartedness that in a frenzy of despair I picked up that thing and threw it at her. When I saw her fall to the floor, I ran away. I couldn't stay—I didn't then think she was dead—but I knew I had hurt her, and I thought if I got away she would not dare tell of my presence there. I knew there were enough people there to take care of her. I knew she suspected Mr. Locke of being her own husband in disguise, and I wanted to get away from the whole scene. I came home in a taxicab, and, saying I had been to my modiste's, I changed into an ordinary evening gown and went to the Gardners' with my husband."

"You wore to the studio a pair of white shoes that had been recently cleaned."

"My maid cleaned them that very night, with a chalk preparation. Why?"

"It was that which put me on your track—that and the gloves. There was a strong, clear line of chalk, in the den where you stood at that time. Also, the gloves pointed to a society lady, and as Claudine had told me of your visit to Mrs. Barham's that very evening while she was dressing for the masquerade, I just put the various bits of evidence together and they pointed to you. I fear, Mrs. Sayre, we must arrest you."

"Not alive," and Rosamond Sayre raised her fingers to her lips.

"Stop her, Hutchins, she's poisoning herself!" Lane cried.

But they were too late. A tiny pellet had served to cheat the emissaries of law and justice, and in a moment

or two, Rosamond Sayre had ended her earthly career.

As Madeleine Barham had died at her hand, so Rosamond Sayre owed her own death to the cruelty and crime of her friend.

"It all proved up," Lane said, in telling Andrew Barham of the suicide. "She had been, among many others, a victim of Mrs. Barham's blackmail. She had reached the very end of her patience and her resources. She hoped to be present at a mortifying disclosure at the studio, and thought that possibly she could make a sort of deal, later, with Mrs. Barham, if there was a secret to be kept.

"Also, she said that Mrs. Barham discovered the scarab on the table in the den. That she had taken it, knowing it was her husband's and planning to use it as corroboration of her suspicion that he was Locke himself. So, Mrs. Barham had the stone in her hand when she fell. Miss Cutler, as she has told, took it from the dead woman, knowing it to be valuable, and a prized possession of Locke's."

"It's all true," Barham said, "and here is my part of the story. I did not recognize my wife at all, though I saw the lady in the Oriental costume. But I did recognize Rosamond Sayre. I knew her costume, having seen it recently, and under the edge of her mask I saw enough of her face to recognize her beyond all possibility of mistake. So, I instantly assumed that she had learned my secret and was there to confound me with its disclosure. I concluded at once to go away forever. I had no thought of my wife's being there—I didn't think to get the scarab, which was about the only thing there that could connect me with Andrew Barham. I merely tossed my monk's robe to Charley and walked off. I had no

thought of ever returning and simply carried out the plan I had from the beginning when discovery should come—merely to obliterate Tommy Locke from the face of the earth. I went back on two occasions to try to find that scarab. Partly because of its real value and partly because it meant a revelation of the fact that Locke and Barham were one and the same. There is my story. I did suspect Mrs. Sayre from the very first—but I didn't want to suggest it. She was—I thought—a friend of my wife, and, too, it seemed too dreadful to turn suspicion toward a woman. I went to see her—and she begged me to try to hush up the whole matter. Now she has paid the extreme penalty herself—is it necessary to put the facts before the public?"

"That's as the police see fit, Mr. Barham. It may be necessary to tell the story, or they may conclude not to."

"I want especially to prevent Mrs. Selden's learning of it," Barham said. "It would break her heart to know the extent of her daughter's wrong-doing. I shall do all I can to make her life calm and serene for a year or so. At the end of that time, I shall feel I have done my duty by her, and I shall arrange for her to live apart from me."

Barham did not say who would live with him, and who would be a more desirable companion than his present mother-in-law.

But in his heart, he said, with a great wave of loving affection, "My blessed little Pearl!"

THE END

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